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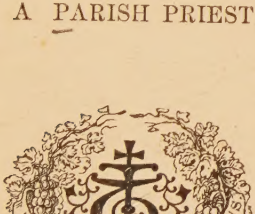

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I.

GOD'S PRESENCE.

Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God.—Psalm xlii. 1.

We have about us, or, to speak more truly, we are ourselves, immortal souls. We are beings who have once been born, but who now can never die. We came out of nothing, but we cannot go into nothing again;—O God forbid, the merciful great God forbid, we should pass into nothing! When they who have led lives of pleasure, of covetousness, of self-willed sin—when such, I say, come to lie upon their death-beds, they may perhaps feel that awful, impossible wish that they could pass into nothing: for to be nothing were better than to be in the strong gripe of Satan, amid the intolerable heats of hell. Dying sinners may feel that their immortality is to be an unendingness of pain, of remorse, of despair; and the deadness and the dumbness of passing into nothing, though *it* surely would make even a dying sinner shudder, would be more bearable to think of than the life in hell—the living in fire, the feeding on fire, the breathing fire, the being clothed in fire, the thirsting for cool water where all, all is fire—above,

beneath, on this side, and on that side, a far-stretching country of burning fire. Fearful is the thought! fearful enough to quench lust, to cool anger, to make us out of love with money, to spoil our appetites for worldly pleasures! To be nothing is indeed better than to become a dweller in that godless country of intolerable fire; but to those who love God in earnest—that is, who are trying diligently in their poor way to live strict lives, to keep the commandments, and to carry a cross—to such the thought of passing into nothing would be disheartening—it would be quite a punishment. Thus it is when we come to Church that we are not contented with thanking God for our preservation, but first of all we return Him solemn thanks for our creation; and why? Because surely a wonderful and endearing mercy it is to have been created even into this sinful world; for otherwise we could not have been redeemed, we could not have carried a cross; we could not have had any interest in our blessed Saviour's Blood. Persons who have not set their minds and hearts on heaven and heavenly things, may think this a strange, unreal way of talking. They may say that the chances are so much against us, the Gospel is so strict, the Church so severe, the commandments so hard to keep, prayer so irksome, lust so strong, money so precious, pleasure so dear, that really common-sense would teach us, what Scripture expressly says—that few would be saved. Then, if the chances be so much against our getting to heaven, and so strongly in favour of our going to hell, would it not be better never to have been born, than to run such an awful risk with the chances against us? I dare say this may have come across some of you who are not religious; it may have come across you at

those times when your conscience speaks sharply to you, and you tremble to think of death and God. But let us turn the question into Bible language, and then see how it sounds. You fancy it would have been better never to have been born than to run the risk of going to hell with the chances against you, and therefore you cannot from your heart thank God for your creation. You will remember that our blessed Lord said of the man who should betray Him, "It had been better for that man if he had never been born." Now, brethren, how will your sinful and most wicked wish sound if I put it in this way?—You wish to be like Judas Iscariot: you say of your ownselves what our Lord so awfully said of him, that "it would be better for you if you had never been born." O brethren! this is a frightening way of putting it; yet how true, how very true an one! You *are* Judases: you have betrayed and are betraying, perhaps have made up your minds to go on betraying, the self-same Lord whom Judas betrayed. He made a miserable end of it; so will you. He made such an end of it that his own merciful Creator said of him, that "it would have been better for him if he had never been born;" and you, you already, before you come to your end, say the very same thing of yourselves. O would it not be well if this plain, straightforward way of putting the matter should startle you, make you think, make you pause, make you calculate whether it would not be better to turn off the road whereon you are now walking, and throw yourselves at God's feet, and make your peace with the Saviour you are now betraying? I leave you to think of this, my careless brethren; at present it seems to you a forced, unnatural sort of feeling to rejoice in our creation,

simply because it enables us to take up a cross and go after Jesus Christ. Well: but I must say something more than this: something which I cannot expect any to understand, or at least to believe, but those who are serving God in earnest, with a diligent, loving strictness. What I say then is this: that it would be an immense, inconceivable mercy to have been created—to run all risks of damnation—to face sickness, sorrow, pain, labour, poverty, and death, merely to have knelt *once* at a church altar, and *once* received the Blessed Sacrament. I say this quite thinkingly; and of course it shows what a price I set upon that wonderful Gift, what a faith I have in that precious Sacrament, what a love I feel for that heavenly communion: I say it quite thinkingly, that it would be an immense, inconceivable mercy to have been created—to run all risks of damnation—to face sickness, sorrow, pain, labour, poverty, and death, merely to have knelt *once* at a church altar, and *once* received the Blessed Sacrament.

Now, I will change the subject all at once, or at least I will seem to change it. The soul came forth from God: its deepest natural wish is to return to Him from whom it came: the creature desires to go back to the Creator: the one chief end it has is the presence of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—the blessed presence, the bright, happy presence of the eternal Trinity—that is the home, the harbour, the resting-place, the shelter, the church of an immortal soul. The holier it becomes, the more it thirsts after this unspeakable, sweet presence. My soul is athirst for God! O when shall I come to appear before the presence of God! "As the hart longeth for the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God!"

"Show me Thy Face; Thy Face, Lord, will I seek." Such are the longings of an immortal soul pining in this exile of sin, in this vale of tears, for the sight of its Creator; such are the struggles which it makes in its prison-house of infirm and self-willed flesh, like an impatient bird newly caught, dashing its breast and ruffling its feathers against the bars of its cruel cage, which keep it back from the high tree-tops and the broad blue sky, where the poor pining creatures fain would be. O, dear brethren! have you anything at all *like* such feelings as these? is the world felt by you to be a place of exile? do you pine and pant for heaven? have you no covetousness except coveting to be with Christ? are you already crucified, dead, buried, risen, and ascended with Him, in Him, and through Him? or does all this seem strange, wild language, which you suppose is all right because it is in the Psalms, but which, to say the honest truth, you do not understand, and you do not wish to feel? Well; hereby you may know whether you are a real Christian or not. I do not mean to say, brethren—I should only be ensnaring your consciences if I did say so—I do not mean to say that any one of us has to the full or to the letter that exalted, craving thirst after God which the great David had! O no! be it far from us such proud self-righteousness—be it far from us to think so well of ourselves, or to fancy ourselves saints when we are but awkward, slow-learning children on the lowest form in the school of Christ. Still, have we in our little measure, I do not say *such* feelings, but anything *like* such feelings? I have reason to think that some of us have—that some of us do feel the world a burden, life almost wearisome, the earth unlovely, and all for the

love of that other world where Jesus is, and where we fain would be. Ah, brethren! let us thirst after the presence of our Jesus; let us thirst after it more and more, day by day, continually; let us thirst till the world seems a hollow toy, a worthless, mocking, painted mask with no face—no face of God or man behind it, but a mere mask, all mask, hiding God and heaven, and nobleness and blessedness, and all good and great and lasting things; let us thirst after the presence of our Jesus till our hearts ache with thirsting; yet let us not so thirst for His glorious presence in heaven as to forget, or overlook, or make light of His dear presence which we have already upon earth. O no! do not so thirst as to do this. Let us pine for heaven—I do not say nay to that: how can I say nay to what was an apostle's wish?—but let us enjoy with deepest reverence, fullest, humblest love—let us enjoy now on earth the presence of our Jesus, while, when, and where it is wonderfully and compassionately vouchsafed unto us. What can be plainer than this? His life is to be our life; our life is to be His life; we in Him, and He in us; He and we one together. What can be plainer? This is to be a Christian; nothing short of this will do; heated feelings will not do; a moral life will not do; an unworking faith will not do. No! it must be nothing short of this: we in Him, and He in us; He and we one together. The believer's communion with Christ is the believer's Christianity; faith is part of his Gospel, and works are part of his Gospel; but his communion with his Saviour—that is his whole Gospel taken all together, beginning, middle, and end.

To the attentive and meditating Christian our Lord's Life is made up of more lives than one. As His graci-

ous Wounds were five, as the senses through which we work our lives are five, so the Lives He lived are five also—five sweetest, deepest mysteries for our faith, and fear, and love to look at, to wonder at, to pray over, to adore; nay, so lofty are our privileges, so inspiriting our duties, not only to look at, to wonder at, to pray over, to adore, but in our far-off way to copy and imitate. There is His Hidden Life in the womb, in His infancy and boyhood, and up to thirty years of age. Wonderful are the lessons which we draw from that, while the Church, through Advent and Christmas, up to Lent, celebrates the Hidden Life of Jesus. Then, Secondly, there is His life with men for the three years of His public ministry at feasts, in synagogues, in cities, houses, crowds, and conversations; and wonderful are the lessons which we draw from that, while the Church, through all the long line of her Sundays after Trinity, celebrates the Social Life of Jesus. Then, Thirdly, there is His Suffering Life, His Crown, His Cross, His Wounds, His Burial; and wonderful are the lessons which we draw from that, while the Church, in Lent and Passiontide, celebrates the Suffering Life of Jesus. Then there is His Glorified Life, first for forty days on earth, between Easter Day and Ascension Thursday, and since then at God's Right Hand; and wonderful are the lessons which we draw from that, while the Church, in her Eastertide and Ascension services, speaks of His Glorified Life on earth, and is for ever making mention of His glorious priesthood, God and Man, up in heaven. Then, Lastly, there is His Mystical Life, *i.e.*, His blessed Presence left on earth—His blessed Presence, both as God and Man, vouchsafed upon the altars of

the holy Church, in the venerable sacrament of His Body and His Blood. O need I say how wonderful the lessons are we learn from that His Mystical Life, which the Church is always celebrating, in honour of which she builds her chancels and her altars, bows the knee, sings angels' songs, and is beside herself with holy wonderment and joy? Nay, it were a cold thing to talk only of the wonderful *lessons* which we learn; rather let us speak of the wonderful strength, of the solid help, of the substantial grace, of the real food, of the unspeakable comfort of the Divine communion which we therein have, find, and join with our dearest Lord.

O then let us never *so* thirst for the presence of Jesus up in heaven as to forget, overlook, or make light of the sacramental presence of Jesus on the earth—the real, abiding, comforting presence vouchsafed to us in our pilgrimage. It is by lighting our lamps ever newly at that altar-fire that we shall best increase the saintly thirst after His presence, up in heaven; it is there before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament, that the gentle star-like lamp burns day and night in honour of our Jesus, the gentle star-like lamp of Christian hope and love; it is there that fear and wonder at all hours bend the knee, and wear the stone steps hollow with their kneeling. O, Christian men and Christian women! honour, I beseech you, the Blessed Sacrament—honour the Blessed Sacrament—honour it greatly—honour it by your coming, you who have love's right to come—honour it by your staying away, you who have fear's prudence not to come—honour it, you little children, who look wistfully backward at the altar, forced to leave the Church while we stay behind—honour it, all of you—honour greatly the Blessed Sacrament of the

Lord's most holy Body and the Lord's most precious Blood! Jesus lives, and is present at His Father's Right Hand, for our poor sakes; but also, Jesus lives, and is present on the altars of the Church with us poor, trembling penitents. Think, O think of that altar-life, that sacramental presence of our Jesus! Must not our waiting on Him there be certainly the most important act of our Christian lives? Is it not plain that our future happiness must depend in no little measure upon the way in which we realize our Saviour's presence now on earth? In plain words, our honouring of the Blessed Sacrament must have much, very, very much to do with settling our eternal state hereafter; and, this being so, will it not be right for me to take some pains to teach you, and for you to take some pains to learn, these five things about the Blessed Sacrament? 1. What to do and how to feel beforehand in the way of preparation; 2. How to behave while we are in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament; 3. What to do and how to feel afterwards in the way of meditation and thanksgiving; 4. How to be always receiving the holy communion in spirit, even when we cannot be receiving it bodily in church; and, 5. The blessing of a frequent reverent reception of it. And these five things, with God's help, will I make plain to you. They are five things important for all Christians to learn: but in this place, where so many of us communicate so frequently, it is most needful we should learn to do that well which we do so often; for what we do often we are apt to do lightly, though we are less likely to come to the altar lightly for the very frequency of our coming: for think of the blessed presence which we then and therein realize. There was a time when our forefathers were dwelling in

the thick woods; the day was spent upon the chase; the night consumed over the wine-cup. What would have been the thoughts of our wild pagan fathers, if they had been told that in Syria, a land no further than the other end of the Mediterranean Sea, the Almighty Creator of the world was in man's flesh and true nature, walking about, eating, sleeping, preaching, letting Himself be touched, and putting up with ill-treatment? They who worshipped the wind when it rocked frightfully in the old forest—they who fell down before the quick eye of the lightning, and who held their peace in council while the thunder spoke of its own majesty—would not even they have had strange, rude thoughts come across their minds, and uncouth emotions stir within their breasts, at the idea of the unseen Creator being seen, spoken to, and "handled" by the men of Syria? Would they not have yearned, even those wild men, for the presence of Him who made them; and the earth and the woods would seem a different earth and woods, from the very thought that He who created them was on the earth, and amid the similar woods of a land beyond the sea? Surely we much more, without prying into the mystery, without having adequate, precise notions of what is above the weakness of man's poor expression, ought so far to realize the Lord's presence in His Sacrament as to feel the whole world round us changed in its look and sound, from the mere knowledge that He is present on it still, in His Manhood as well as in His Godhead. Surely, in proportion to our real earnestness, we must be attracted thitherwards even by the most uncertain, vague thought, that of some sort or other there is a presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. But oh! in the vouchsafed plenitude of the Catho-

lic doctrine, what a profound, serene abyss of joyful contemplation do we find? Nay, love findeth all things there—all things but one; and that one *love* findeth not—matter for disputation.

And now, then, that I have explained myself, can you not understand why I should have said at first, what perhaps sounded in your ears like an exaggeration, that it was an immense, inconceivable mercy to have been created, to run all risks of damnation, to face sickness, sorrow, pain, labour, poverty, and death, merely to have knelt *once* at a church altar, and *once* received the Blessed Sacrament? O brethren! you who fear hell, who think anything better than the chance of that savage, savage fire, how little will you believe us when we say that one communion, in the quiet of the early morning, is enough to make us joy in the Power which created us, the Wisdom which redeemed us, and the Goodness which sanctifies us? How little will you believe us when we say, that one communion is cheaply purchased at the price of all the ills and pains of this life? Ah me! how little will you believe us, and yet we say it from our hearts!

II.

PREPARATION FOR COMMUNION.

But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.—Philem. 22.

So wrote Paul the aged from his prison-house at Rome. The zealous apostle had caught Onesimus, St. Philemon's runaway slave, and had made a convert of him, and he sends him back to his master as a brother now, no longer as a slave. There is scarcely anything in Scripture more winning, more gracefully running over with the sweet manners and affectionate courtesy of a saint than this short epistle; and at last, breaking off from his main subject, the apostle holds out his coming, or a chance of his coming, as if St. Philemon were to consider a visit from him quite reward enough for his holding out to Onesimus welcome and forgiveness. "But," says he, "but withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you." Would these words have no effect on St. Philemon? Would he regard the mere chance of the wonderful St. Paul becoming his guest as a common-place matter? Would it occupy no part of his thoughts? Would it not be the cause, bare chance as it was, of some hospitable preparation? Think, brethren, how

the case would be—think of what passed in St. Philemon's mind—think of what was done in St. Philemon's house!

There is One out upon the earth whom we love more than Philemon could love Paul—One whom we revere, whom Philemon revered, whom Paul so revered that at the sound of His voice he fell to the earth. He it is who, though He be to-day in glory at the Right Hand of the Eternal Father, is also to-day very really, and lovingly, and wonderfully upon earth; nay, His own spiritual Body has been to-day upon the altar of this church, and is now doing gracious things, imprisoned of His own sweet will within the bodies of those who have faithfully received Him. He it is who, though He be to-day in glory at the Right Hand of the Eternal Father, is also on the earth as well, a stranger, a pilgrim, a secret one, homeless, relationless, houseless, yet wishing to be housed by those who love Him, for in no manner of house can He dwell save in the hearts of those who keep His commandments. It is no longer, then, St. Paul whom we hear thus begging for a lodging in the earthly house of his dear Philemon; it is the houseless Saviour, houseless upon earth, who cries daily from off ten thousand times ten thousand altars in the Catholic Church, unto each Christian man and Christian woman, yea, and Christian child no less, "But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you." O brethren! can it be needful for me to say so much as one word to prove how important a duty it is to prepare yourselves for the Blessed Sacrament, to prepare to receive within yourselves that gift beyond all price, that presence beyond all words—the very Body

and the very Blood of Almighty God, Jesus Christ, both God and Man, the Maker, the Saviour, and the Judge of all the world? No! it cannot be needful for me to stop to prove that you *ought* to prepare yourselves, to prepare your hearts, to prepare a lodging for our blessed Lord within yourselves. The practical question, I am sure, is a much simpler one, namely, *How* are we to prepare ourselves? Let us then give a little attention to this matter.

Every rightly-informed, rightly-believing Christian, can have no doubt whatever that the reception of the Blessed Sacrament is by far the most important action which he can have to perform upon this earth; it is more important than dying—yes, far more important, though the lingering horrors and desperate struggle of the last hour may seem to worldly eyes a more awful sight than the quiet altar and humble appearance of bread and wine. Yet to go to God is surely not so important as to receive God into ourselves. No! a sacrament, well considered and looked at by faith, is a more awful sight than a death-bed, and we kneeling on the stone step are more awfully engaged than when we are lying on the bed of death. This is a most weighty thought; it may at first sound like an exaggeration, but when it is thoroughly considered, it will be found to be nothing more than the language of soberness and truth. Now it is almost always found that the grace given in the sacrament depends upon the reverent preparation which we make for it; and this is also a most weighty thought. Remember, the *amount* of preparation does not wholly depend on the *length* of preparation, but on the *heartiness* of preparation; and then, I say, it is found that grace is given

in proportion to the preparation men have made to receive the grace. Every one who comes in faith and penitence is filled, every appetite is satisfied; they who have little appetite are satisfied, yet they get but little; they who have a vehement appetite are satisfied, and they of course get great grace and vehement abundance. This is set forth in what happened to the Israelites with the manna in the wilderness: "He that gathered little had no lack, and he that gathered much had nothing over." The Blessed Sacrament is a deep clear well, inexhaustible, pure, and ever fresh, wherein is contained both the Godhead and Manhood of our Lord. Every *clean* vessel brought to that well is filled to the brim—some hold more and some hold less; but the holding more or less depends not on being priest or good scholar, or on anything else, but the heartiness of devout preparation. Thus all clean vessels which are dipped therein are filled to the very brim; and, as to the *unclean* vessels, they are cracked or broken.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a Sacrament of love. We come thereto in order that we may be wholly consumed with divine love, all our unmortified affections burnt away, all our sinful lusts withered up before that flame, all self-destroyed, so that we may be wholly God's, in body, soul, and spirit. Green wood burns slowly, and is but partially consumed; dry wood kindles quickly, blazes cheerfully, and is consumed to ashes. As is the action of fire upon green wood, so is the effect of the Blessed Sacrament in a negligently-prepared heart; its action is partial and imperfect, not from want of power, for it is the Sacrament of the Almighty One, but because He does not choose to put forth His power where man has not chosen to make a

diligent preparation to receive Him. Now St. Paul himself, the great and inspired apostle, tells us wherein our preparation is chiefly to consist: "Let a man examine himself and *so* let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." I must, however, endeavour to put what I shall say into a practical shape: it will, with a very little alteration, apply to all communicants; but I address it chiefly to those who are frequent communicants. Those who come once a month, or four times a year, to that Blessed Sacrament, must of course make their preparations longer and more diligent: it should for the most part begin the Sunday before; so that they shall be praying and examining their consciences daily for a week before receiving the Lord's Body. To weekly communicants I should recommend that their preparation should begin at their evening prayers on Friday. And now let us see how that preparation is to be conducted.

On Friday night, then, they should diligently examine their consciences to see if they have committed any mortal sin since their last communion. Our own common-sense tells us that there are two sorts of sin, which by religious writers are called mortal and venial, and in our Litany are distinguished the one as sins, and the other as deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil. By whatever names you choose to call them, it must be plain to every one who has tried at all to live a strict life that there are two very different kinds of sin. There are sins, one act of which is enough to throw us out of a state of grace, one act of which we feel is a fall, a complete relapse, after which we need a new beginning over again—such is one act of drunkenness, one lie, one act of fornication, one act of

stealing, one act of dishonesty in business, and except perhaps in the early stage of an habitual swearer's conversion, one taking of God's holy Name in vain, and so on. Then there are sins which tease and vex us, which we struggle against, and yet they get the better of us, which we repent of, and they do not take the love of God out of our hearts—they do not, and we feel they do not, throw us out of a state of grace; such are exaggerations in talking, wandering thoughts in prayer, inward feelings of anger, a passing pleasure in eating and drinking, idling about, frivolous conversation, and so on: these are sins of infirmity, these are negligences and ignorances, these are the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, of which the Litany speaks. These little sins are great snares, because though they are little in size they are many in number. If we really are in a state of grace we shall get clearer of them day by day, and come to think of them not so little as we did at first, especially if we practise particular examination of conscience; this will be a sign to us whether or not we are in a state of grace. Now, on Friday night you should carefully examine your consciences, to see if you have committed any one act of mortal sin since your last communion. If you have, then you must confess it distinctly and separately in your prayers, humble yourself before God for it, ask for a special forgiveness for it; and if it has been something very great and very unworthy, and very inconsistent with the profession of religion which you are making before the world, then I think you would do well not to come to the altar on the very next Sunday, but to take another week to humble yourself and repent in. You of course who are in the practice

of weekly confession, will naturally take refuge in that kindly sustaining ordinance. If, however, which I hope and trust will most often be the case, you do not feel any act of mortal sin upon your conscience, you must thank God for His merciful grace, which alone has preserved you from it. Then say the prayer, "We do not presume," out of the Communion Service, and after that the 84th Psalm, "How amiable are Thy dwellings!" This Psalm is said over almost the whole of Europe by persons preparing themselves for communion. It only requires to be read in order to see how beautifully it applies, how wonderfully it is fitted to excite that longing, that hunger and thirst after the Blessed Sacraments which has been in all ages the distinguishing mark of the saints. Well, then, let this be the exercise of Friday evening: to examine your conscience to see if you have committed any mortal sin since your last communion, to thank God if you have not fallen, to repent if you have, to say the prayer, "We do not presume," and the 84th Psalm.

On Saturday morning do nothing more than add to your prayers the collect, "We do not presume," and the 84th Psalm.

On Saturday night examine your conscience about venial sins; see how you have been getting on in religion, whether you have made progress in conquering your besetting infirmity, whether it be temper, or hasty speech, or sloth, or wanderings in prayer, or whatever it may be; and particularly, if you put the result of your examinations of conscience down on paper, compare day with day, and so test yourself; call to mind what particular resolutions you made at your last communion, and how far you have kept them, or how far you

have broken them; consider attentively and humbly the grace which God has vouchsafed to you, the heavenly thoughts He has put into your mind, the lights He has given you in prayer, the help He has sent you in temptation: and then think how little your improvement has answered to the greatness of God's grace, how sadly you have come short of what your Saviour, in His loving anxiety for your salvation, might have expected of you. By spending some short time in thus looking into your little faults, your petty sins, your everyday infirmities, it is astonishing what a power you will get to cleanse your conscience, to lay it open to the blessed influences of the Holy Ghost, and to furnish your heart somewhat better to receive that dear and mighty Guest whom you expect to entertain on the morrow. This done, again say the collect, "We do not presume," and the 84th Psalm; and go to bed with a kind of holy and impatient joy; to think that Jesus will come to you in the morning, that you will—you can hardly believe so great a thing for very gladness—that you will actually receive His Body into your body the next day, that for some hours He and you may be so utterly one that, as a saint says, "The prayers you pray for awhile after communion, are not so much your prayers as His who is praying in you."—I say, go to bed with a kind of holy and impatient joy: O dear, O blessed, O most holy Lord Jesus, can it be that I, a sinner, should rise up Sunday after Sunday, and that Thou shouldst come unto me, give thyself into my hands, and enter into me? Ah! Lord, I cry with the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof; but speak the word only, and Thy servant shall be healed." Let this, then, be the

exercise of Saturday night: examine your conscience about venial sins, see what progress you have made in strictness, bless God for His grace, and humble yourself before Him for your own shortcoming, say the collect, "We do not presume," and the 84th Psalm; and be sure you let your last thought, as you lie down in bed, be a loving thought of the Blessed Sacrament; for that which takes the last hold of the mind at night, is mostly that which gets first hold of it in the morning.

At last Sunday morning comes. The first thing you should endeavour to do is to think of the time when you were first converted, when you first became religious; try to bring back again the same strong purposes, the same warmth of heart, the same fervour which you had then, when first you found out what a desperate sinner you were, what a God and Saviour He was against whom you had all along been sinning, how shocking the end of sin was, and how bright, how peaceful the everlasting place where the righteous are. So light your lamp afresh each communion, renew your old fervour, so that you may not slip back into coldness, or swerve on one side into sadness, which is worse far than even coldness. After this, say once more the collect, "We do not presume," and the 84th Psalm; and then endeavour, either by prayer, or, if you have not time for that, by serious thought, to bring yourself into that peculiar temper of mind which is so specially acceptable to Jesus Christ in those who frequent the Blessed Sacraments. Try to forget both your sins and your good works; put out of sight as well what you have done amiss as what you have done right. Remember I am not saying anything lax to you when I give you this counsel, for I have already fixed Friday

night for solemn repentance for your mortal sins, and Saturday night for a humble vexation with yourselves for your venial sins. But on Sunday morning I recommend you to forget both good deeds and evil deeds—to put them utterly out of your minds. You have already ascertained that, though quite unworthy of yourself, yet, through Christ's forbearing mercy, you may come safely to the Blessed Sacrament; and, having ascertained as much as that, be quiet and content, forget who you are and what you are, throw yourself away, think only of Him who is coming to you—think only of Jesus. To forget self is the highest sort of preparation for receiving Jesus. The temper of mind which He loves most of all, is the temper which empties itself of itself; the heart most after His heart, is the one which throws self away in order that it may hold more of Him. Its language is, "Jesus! I come to Thee; I come trusting in no righteousness of my own—I come with nothing of my own; I am blind, for I cannot see good things; I am lame, for I cannot walk on the right road; I am deaf, for I cannot hear Thy holy word aright; I am dumb, for I cannot speak of Thee as I ought; I am naked, for my own righteousnesses are but as rags, and cover not my shame; I am barren, for I bring forth a miserable harvest of good works, and not as I ought to do. Here then I am, O Lord! this Sunday morning; I am going up to Thy Church—I am going to Thy holy altar; I confess that I shall kneel there, blind, lame, deaf, dumb, naked, and barren, and it troubles me not—no, it troubles me not, for I am going to Thee. I want sight, Lord—I want soundness, hearing, voice, clothing, fruitfulness in well-doing. I want them, Lord, but only from Thee.

I am not troubled because I have them not—no, I would rather be without them—yes, for I would rather, far rather have them from Thee. Thus I come, emptied of myself, emptied quite, emptied utterly, begging of Thee to fill me, to fill me with thine own dear self. O Lord! how bold I am to come in such a plight to Thee, in beggar's plight; yet, O my Jesus! I do believe it is the plight Thou lovest best to see me in—therefore it is in this plight I come, in beggar's plight!"

Believe me, my brethren, there is no temper of mind more acceptable to God than this; this is the one thing which I would have you set yourselves to realize on the Sunday morning. From there being no bell to guide you, many of you are in church long before the time for the morning Sacrament; and you cannot better employ that time, whether on your knees or sitting down, than in offering yourself up to God as naked and destitute of everything, coming to Him to be filled and clothed, abandoning yourself altogether, taking pleasure in confessing your own nothingness, and seeking only to receive all from Him, and to give up your own will and way utterly, literally, now and for ever, to the simple will of Him who made, who redeemed, and who sanctifies you. This is the very thing which God Himself means in the Psalms, when he says, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." God delighted to represent Himself in most touching words, under the figure of a hen who would fain gather her chickens under her wings. So in the Psalm, surely, the words bring before us the figure of a bird. Ah! think how, in the half-clothed bushes of the spring, the little helpless unfledged young ones, who can but make an idle fluttering with their awkward wings, and who have hardly voice

to pray for food, a voice so thin and low at least that you may sit by the bush and never find it out—think how they open their mouths, look upwards to the parent birds, receive their food from them, make a fluttering stir in the nest to show how grateful they are, as if it was the best kind of thanks they had to give; then satisfied with food they drop their heads and lie quiet in the nest, though we see their little hearts beat a hundred times a minute beneath the flesh of their unfeathered breasts. Ah, brethren! this is going on in many a bush around us. I would that we, receiving our heavenly food from Jesus, could be as the little birds which Jesus Himself has kindly created this very spring, to sing and chirp His praise when men hold their peace for lack of love! O, when the east winds blow and the tree-tops rock wildly—the east winds of adversity and the tree-tops of this changing world, threatening to part and scatter the handful of sticks and moss which we short-lived creatures call our homes, how quiet, happy, and unconcerned should they be in their nests, whom Jesus fed in the sweet morning light with that unspeakable sweet Food of His!

III.

BEHAVIOUR AT COMMUNION.

The first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.—Rev. xxi. 1.

Such is the place in which we are to go to live for ever and ever; such of us at least as live strict lives here, and do their best to mortify their own wills, and to keep the commandments of God. Of course, a very different place is prepared for those who please themselves, and do their own wills in this world—a place so different that I must not speak of the two places in the same breath. "The first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." How very wonderful and full of meaning, of many meanings which we can fancy to ourselves, and of many more meanings far above our fancies, are those words—"and there was no more sea!" Strange world! and we are to live therein, to be happy there, so happy that we know not how happy; and we are to be great there, and glorious, and to see God, and to do heavenly work, which work is peace, and all to be kings, and all to be priests; and Man too, though in Person all and only divine, is the real King of

all that world—One with five bright wounds in His Body, who died and was buried as we are, who had a mortal woman for His mother. What a change will it be from this world to that! O what a change! How are we to behave when we get there? How are we to learn beforehand the new manners which we shall want there? Yes, to think of heaven is a great, a stirring, a cheering, yet a quieting thought: but there follows from it a very practical question, a very practical question indeed—How are we to learn on earth the manners we shall want in heaven? Let us try to get something like part of an answer to this question—I say *part* of an answer, for that is enough for our practical good at present.

Let us suppose the case of a traveller in a foreign country. He may be in the capital city of some great and powerful kingdom. Among other sights, a magnificent building may be pointed out to him as the palace of the emperor or king, the palace in which the mighty sovereign dwells; where his ministers do their work in governing a thousand counties; where life and death are decided upon; where every day, between every sunrise and every sunset, measures are taken which make hundreds happy or hundreds miserable. Can you not fancy that the traveller, if he was a thoughtful man, would soon forget the beauty, and the brightness, and the largeness of the building? He would look upon the closed gates of the palace, guarded by soldiers on either side; he would watch the people who came to see the king; he would watch the gates open and then close, the people disappearing into the inside of the palace: then he would think—That man will, in a few minutes, be in the presence of that glorious

king! How will he behave? what manners will he put on? Will he succeed in getting what he asks for? or will the king be out of temper with his asking what he ought not to ask, and perhaps the poor man may bring himself into some misfortune, and wish he had never gone within those palace-gates? Now, dear brethren, when I see one of my parishioners dying, I have some such thoughts as these. A man on his death-bed seems to me to be lying at the gates of God Almighty, the just and terrible King of all this wonderful world. My duty is to help him through those gates, and so, to the best of my power, I do. But I cannot help thinking other thoughts sometimes, thoughts which concern myself. I cannot help remembering that I shall one day lie at those palace-gates, lie panting for breath, and moaning in my pain, and they who wait upon me wiping the uncomfortable sweat of death from my face, and moistening my cracking lips, and the clergyman praying at my bedside; and this makes me look upon the dying man and wonder. I think—In five minutes that man will be in the presence of Almighty God! How will he behave? what will he see? what will be said to him? what will be done with him? I shudder to think of these things; I cannot help it, however much I trust in God's mercy, through Jesus Christ. In spite of Christ's abounding atonement, I confess God's judgments do seem to me unspeakably awful. So I ask myself—Is there no way in which one can practise beforehand the manners and behaviour which we shall have at once to put on in the presence of our God? O brethren! dear brethren! "The first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no

more sea." What manner of world is that? Five minutes and we may be there: a fit, a fever, a short inflammation, and lo, "the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and there is no more sea!" I am preaching now: why is it unlikely that the church bell may be tolling for me before sunset? I hope I should not be afraid to go; I *do* hope I should not be in the least unwilling to go: still God's judgments do appear to me unspeakably awful, and I cannot help again asking the question—Is there no way in which we can practise beforehand the manners and behaviour which we shall have at once to put on in the presence of God, when "the first heaven and the first earth shall have passed away; and there shall be no more sea?" To this question I cannot help saying, Yes—I say Yes, because I know and believe, and would die for my belief, that my Saviour is present upon earth, both as God and Man, as well Man as God, and that that presence is in the Blessed Sacrament. So here I get an answer to my question at once: I *can* practise beforehand how to behave in God's presence hereafter, by taking great pains with my behaviour in His presence here. If then this be so, surely, brethren, it is no light or unpractical matter to learn how to behave at the Blessed Sacrament. It is a great and a good thing to know how to prepare for the Holy Communion; it is a great and a good thing to know how to return thanks after the Holy Communion; but it is also a great and a good thing to know how to behave *at* the Holy Communion. Let this, then, be our consideration to-day; and let us enter upon it with some such solemn thoughts as these I have been laying before you.

The temper of mind in which you will enter the church on Sunday morning, supposing you in any measure to follow the counsels I gave you about preparation, will be the temper of renouncing self, of emptying yourself wholly of self, of presenting yourself before God as naked and destitute of all things, in beggar's plight, and calling upon Him to clothe you, and to fill you, and to heal you with Himself. Let us suppose you pass through the consecrated doorway of the church in that heavenly frame of mind; I call it heavenly, because it is, as far as we know, the exact temper of the angels themselves. It is thought, by great saints and divines, that the blessed angels have no wills, but that the will of God is to them, and in their hearts, as if it were their very own will. Certainly this is *the one peculiar* temper at which they aim who desire to make themselves saints in the Holy Catholic Church; and therefore it is assuredly the best temper for us poor penitents to have, so far as by God's sweet grace we can realize a temper so far above and beyond our fallen nature. A man who is a frequent communicant, and crosses the doorway of the church in this temper, is in the very best temper in which any one can be in to receive the blessed Body and Blood of our Lord; for what I have already said would go to show that one communion is the best preparation for another, and this is one special blessing attached to frequent communion. Coming to the Blessed Sacrament is the chief way of practising for heaven; we have to behave there as knowing we are most awfully in the true presence of Jesus Christ; so that the oftener we come, the more skilful and practised we become in the new and supernatural manners we

shall want as soon as we enter into the other world. This explains something which you may have observed, and, if you have observed it, you cannot fail to have been struck with it. There is a proverb which says, "That familiarity breeds contempt;" and so it does in all worldly matters and in many religious matters also. Hence you would be led to expect that a man who came to the communion every week would be less reverent, have less awe and love, than the man who only came a few times in the year, and then after a long ceremonious preparation. But this is so very far from being true, that you may almost know a frequent communicant among a crowd of others by the peculiar gracefulness of fear, gentle quietness, and subdued manner of love, which distinguish him during that short space of time in which he is within the chancel. In truth, the Blessed Sacrament is not a worldly matter, neither is it like any one other religious matter. Familiarity increases reverence instead of breeding contempt; and it remains true that one communion is the best preparation for another.

Now, then, let us suppose a man entering the consecrated doorway of the church in this temper of mind. How is he to behave? As I have already said, the interval which may elapse between your coming to church and the service beginning, cannot be better spent than in endeavouring to realize more and more this temper of emptying yourself of yourself, of taking pleasure in the confession of your own nothingness, and of throwing yourself at the feet of Jesus to receive all from Him, even his own blessed Self. The great thing in attendance upon the Holy Sacrament is to feel deeply, and yet to feel quietly: where

the feelings are not quiet, there is nearly sure to be irreverence ; and where the feelings are not deep, there is most likely coldness. When the service therefore begins, let go your own thoughts and devotions, and try to follow, yet without constraint, the public office of the Church. Yet if it *should* please God at that time to give you any particular light or very sensible sweetness in prayer, I am sure it is far better to follow His leading rather than anything else. Otherwise, of course it is our clear duty to throw ourselves into the spirit of the public office of the Church. When the commandments are read from the altar, remember the strictness of God's holy law, and how impossible it is for you to keep it without His constant grace ; and then inflame your desire after the Blessed Sacrament, as knowing that there, and there chiefly, is the grace to be obtained. Take a delight in repeating after the priest the Nicene Creed, considering it a great privilege, as indeed it is, to be allowed publicly in church to say out loud before God the articles of the Catholic faith, and try to make every repetition of it wear those articles more deeply, not into your memory only, but into your very inmost heart. Pay particular attention to the Gospel of the day, and renew your fervent desire of the Blessed Sacrament while listening to it, inasmuch as it always contains either some gracious act or gracious speech of our dear Lord Himself. While the offertory is being read, and the alms collected, collect the worthless alms of your scattered thoughts, and fix them more earnestly than ever on that great mystery of love which is about to be fulfilled. In the prayer for the church militant, intercede earnestly for all orders of men ; and, while the notice of communion next

Sunday is being given, be struck with a surprised gratitude to think how Christ offers Himself to you again and again, never wearying of coming to you, and being with you, according to those gracious words of His, "My delights were with the sons of men." During the long exhortation, which many of you perhaps know so well that it would require quite an effort to keep up your attention to it, you cannot do better than think of the preparation you yourself have made this time for the Blessed Sacrament, and pray God to accept it in spite of the imperfections of which you now become more sensible as you draw nearer to His great and holy altar. Then follow the self-abasing confession for sins, said meekly and heart-brokenly on our knees, and the gracious absolution which, by a poor human voice, God pronounces upon us from off His altar. With our fears reassured by comfortable words spoken to us by our Lord Himself, St. Paul, and St. John, we lift up our hearts to the Lord, and join with angels and archangels in crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy," unto the Three Blessed Persons of the Undivided Trinity; and of course, when on great feasts there is a proper preface, we must make our special thanksgiving for the particular grace and mystery which we commemorate on that day. Then the priest, standing hitherto, is on his knees, saying, in the names of you all, that humble collect, "We do not presume." During the awful part of the service which follows, I need hardly say how becoming it is that, while the priest is consecrating, you should remain on your knees, not in humblest loving awe alone, but in positive fear, in breathless silence, in trembling adoration; and all, all, without one exception, join in the Amen which closes the priest's

solemn deed and the Saviour's wonderful coming. That Amen, like the angels at Christmas, tells that Christ is indeed come on the earth. O, I cannot trust myself in words on this tremendous moment—that moment of time which of all moments on the earth is the dreadest and the highest which man's heart can conceive—after that moment, at three on Friday afternoon, when, with a loud cry, He accomplished the work of man's redemption.

Now, my brethren, during the priest's communion and the interval before you come into the chancel and mount the altar-steps, you cannot better occupy yourselves than in making acts of the three great virtues, faith, hope, and charity. First, declare to God your solemn belief in all the articles of the Catholic faith, especially that which declares our blessed Lord to have been Almighty God, as well as true Man, and express your readiness to die for that belief if God should call you to it: Secondly, declare to God your strong hope of your salvation founded on the cross and Passion of His dear Son, and that *that* hope is so strong that you would not for all the world commit one *wilful* sin against His holy law, though it be the smallest venial fault: Thirdly, declare to God your humble, reverent love of Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: express your readiness to give up the world, and the bright things, and the happy things of life, rather than fall from that Divine love; and beg of Him most earnestly to let this Holy Communion be in you as a fresh strengthening of the three chief virtues of religion—faith, hope, and charity.

When kneeling at the altar, I doubt whether it is well to try to make any set prayer, as our thoughts are

apt to be troubled through our extreme nearness to the most holy Body of the Lord, and His very own saving Blood. Can we do better, brethren, in that overwhelming time than keep repeating the Centurion's words, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof;" "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof!" Between receiving the Lord's Body and the going round of the cup, there is of course always a fixed time from our altar holding mostly eleven persons. This interval should be spent as follows:—Of course we are at that moment so intimately united with Jesus that our prayers are most efficacious. Hence it is that pious people recommend us to receive each Sacrament with a particular intention; that is, gravely to make up our minds beforehand to ask of God some particular favour at each communion, the health of one we love, the conversion of one we love, the overcoming of some one of our own infirmities, the pardon of some particular sin, the delivery of the Church out of some particular danger, the coming of some particular blessing on the parish, the rescue of a friend or convert out of some peculiar temptation or spiritual cloud, or distress of conscience, and so on. I think the intention should never be for a *temporal* blessing for *ourselves*. Now the time to ask this great favour should be in that fixed interval after receiving the Lord's Body, as you are sure of having time enough to do so. It may be done in some such way as this: "O eternal Father! I receive this most holy communion of Thy dear Son's Body and Blood, beseeching Thee, because of it, in it, and with it, to grant me"—then name the grace which you wish to have accorded to you. Then, as you return from the altar, say those

words of St. Mary's song, "My soul doth magnify the Lord: He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away." You will find just those words more suitable to your feelings than any thing else which you can find; and, for the same reason, when you are returned to your seat, and giving of thanks is the duty which is now before you, let me urge you not to try thanksgivings of your own, but to kneel down and say, very reverently, yet very joyously, "We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord," all through. After this, if you have any time left, and do not feel particularly drawn to prayer, I beseech you do not force yourself, and so bring on a weariness of mind in the midst of that heavenly feast; but choose beforehand some one point in our blessed Lord's Passion to meditate upon, sitting down—either His scourging, or His crowning, or His carrying the cross, or His five wounds, or one of His seven words. You will find this a very profitable exercise, and one which lays you under no disagreeable constraint, till the low murmuring in the chancel is solemnly broken by the Lord's prayer, and the conclusion of the public office of the Church.

Now, this is one way of behaving at the Blessed Sacrament. Remember, I do not at all mean to say that it is the only one; I only give it to you as a specimen. Perhaps in such matters every man comes to find out a way which is most suitable to him; only it is a help to hear what others find edifying to them. And now, dear brethren, does it all seem very formal, tiresome, and minute, a burdensome ceremony, saying one thing in one place and another thing in another place, repenting here, giving thanks there, and so on?

—does it, I say, seem a formal, tiresome, exaggerated carefulness of behaviour at a church service? Why, is it a more minute, a more scrupulous exactness of behaviour than we should expect to be demanded of us if we went to the court of a king or queen? Formal! O how much mischief does that hard word do to real spirituality! O how many thousands use it without knowing what they mean by it! O ye angels and archangels, how are ye wholly given to forms, by day and by night incessantly crying the same short cry of "Holy, Holy, Holy," incessantly offering up the same form of thanksgiving! And ye cherubim and seraphim! why that eternal folding of your wings, that formal hiding of your hands, that continual lifting up of wheels—how are ye too given up to heavenly postures and to heavenly forms! Ah! brethren, what the angels and archangels, the cherubim and seraphim, feel not as a reproach, why need we feel as though it were a reproach to us? Remember all the prayers at communion are addressed to God the Father, because we are offering up to Him the sweet sacrifice of His dear Son! Ah! then, what a thought is this! Our altar service is a form—our great offering up of the passion of Jesus to the Father is a form!—a form, the same, the same, the same, week after week. Brethren! I almost tremble to say the words, Whom are we imitating—what are we doing—what form is it like? There is a place, it is *not* a church on earth—there is a place where all day and night there is a Priest who offers up His passion to His Father, keeps His cross before His Father's eye, keeps lifting it and lifting it, ever, ever, ever—the same passion, the same cross! O it is a sweet form, for it wins us on earth new compassions every

day; it is a sweet form—it is what we do in a real, however far-off, measure in the Blessed Sacrament. Shall we tire then of our altar form? Ah, if *He* should tire of that form above, who thrice prayed that the cup might pass from Him! And why prayed He thus but to teach us to persevere untiringly? I would we were in that church, not an earthly one, where this form is ever offered: I would we were this hour, dear brethren, not in this church, but present at that form! O how spacious is that church! and the altar how wonderful! and how sweetly the choir sing there! and how brightly are the angels dressed there! and how the palms of the martyrs wave there! and how the crowns of the saints shine there! and the beautiful troops of the virgins gather there more thickly year by year! and the Priest is Jesus, the Son of St. Mary!

IV.

GIVING OF THANKS.

And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives.—St. Mark xiv. 26.

Brethren! I thought of God; I thought till I was amazed at the wonderful, infinite happiness which He enjoys—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in their unspeakable love one with the other, the One only God, blessed for evermore. Then I asked myself about the creatures whom He loves to make happy out of His own happiness, as if (I use foolish human words) His happiness were increased by His creatures being happy—I asked myself who among the creatures were the first in happiness; and I thought it must be the cherubim and seraphim, the nine kinds of angels of which holy Scripture speaks, who are round about the throne, who have the freest of all free wills, because they have no wills of their own, but God's will is simply in the place of theirs: and I cannot fancy any happiness so great as that of giving up my own will to God, especially when I find that I am never unhappy except from being too fond of my own will, which leads me into all manner of troubles, and never

helps me out of any. Then I asked myself who were the second in happiness among the creatures of God; and I thought they must be the blessed saints in heaven, because they have got their fight over and are with Jesus; and the oftener I repeat to myself "*are with Jesus*," the more it seems to me that to be with Jesus contains all that is sweet, high, holy, peaceful, wonderful, and lasting: so I cannot doubt but they are the second in happiness among the creatures of God. Then I asked myself who of all the creatures were the third in happiness; and that question did not seem so easy to answer: but when I had thought a little while, it came to me to think that a Christian man on the day in which he has received the Blessed Sacrament must certainly come next to the angels and saints, must certainly be the third in happiness among the creatures of God.

Now a great deal comes of this thought, and I will show you some of that great deal out of those words of St. Mark, "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives."

Judas was gone out. How sweetly and how quietly that Thursday evening rose the chant of the six Psalms (113—118) from twelve voices in the holy supper-room in Jerusalem, when Jesus and the eleven sang together after our Lord had instituted the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and His Blood! Full of the new strength of that wonderful food, doubtless the eleven thought little, or not at all, of the many foreboding words which had lately fallen from their Master's lips. He was going to His agony, to that awful thrice-said prayer, to the bloody sweat, to the midnight treason of the miserable Judas. Ah! He never thought of

Himself. For three-and-thirty years He had ever a thought for others, none for Himself. He strengthened the eleven for their trial, but He would not sadden them. No! their hearts were full of joy for the unspeakable gift which He had given them; and so He sang with them, sang those six Psalms which David sang, and which were all about Himself—songs of the passion; and themselves also, like the songs of degrees which follow, themselves also songs of steps—the steps of His passion, the steps of that long solemn march of His church-militant across the breadth of an angry, half-conquered world. There was the Blessed Sacrament, then the song of thanks, then the mount of prayer, humiliation, suffering, and ascension. The sacrament, the thanks, the mount—that was the order, one came after the other. Is there not a plain figure here for us to learn from?

The holy undivided Trinity is at this hour, and has been from all eternity, supremely blessed, infinitely glorious, wanting nothing; yet, if I may venture to use low human words, there is a merciful characteristic of God, of all the Three Divine Persons in lovingly different ways, which looks like a want—I say, *looks like a want*, because my ignorance does not tell me how to speak more worthily: God is pleased to *desire* to give Himself, so much of His blessedness and goodness as we can hold, to us His worthless creatures. There is language in the Bible as if God were made sad and His Spirit grieved by man's continual returns to sin and cold ingratitude. What we understand by such language is that God is love, that He desires to pour out His grace upon us, and shed His peace and joy into us, and that we resist, and shut up our hearts

from Him, and do our own wills, and go our own ways. Now God, for the sake of His own glory, has made hearty thanksgiving for one mercy the appointed way to get another mercy from Him; instead of our paying interest to Him for the huge debt we owe Him, He pays us interest a thousand-fold on the poor little parts, the miserable farthings of our debt, which at the prompting of His own grace we pay back to Him. Thus you may come to see what a wonderful thing thanksgiving is; it is something which lets God do what He most loves to do—namely, to pour out His love upon us. I speak as a man, and in man's poor words; but you see what I mean when I say, that thanksgiving is something which lets God do what He most loves to do, namely, to pour out His love upon us. His love is always ready, always forward, always more than half-way on the road to us; but sin and an unthankful spirit stand in the road, hindering it sometimes altogether, and sometimes making it travel far slower than of its own sweet will it is fain to travel. Ah! how is it, then, that we so neglect the duty—yes, I will use the cold word *duty*, for we do not deserve to speak of *privileges*—how is it that we so neglect the duty of thanksgiving? Even those who try to live strict lives must confess that, though they pray a great deal, they do not return thanks in proportion to their prayers; they ask for a grace, and it comes; then they too often give over asking for it, and say nothing more about it; they give no thanks, so God withdraws it, and they fall; then they pray again, and again God gives it; and again they forget to turn their prayers into thanksgivings, and again it is withdrawn. Indeed I do believe it is often so a

whole life through; and thus men miss of final perseverance, because they do not see how that special gift is coupled with a thankful spirit. O brethren! I wish you could get the habit, so easy too, of saying that famous hymn which kings have sung in their great cathedrals when they win a battle, "We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord," all through, whenever God seems to have answered any of your prayers—I wish you would make an effort to realize the Spirit in which the Church after the Blessed Sacrament says, "We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory!"

Now, let us keep this view of thanksgiving in mind. God is always ready to give us gifts: He *waits* to be gracious, He *prepareth* rain for the earth, His *will* is our sanctification; only one thing He ordains to come between one gift and another, the hearty and humble thanksgiving of His creatures. But, if this be so with all His gifts, how much more is it so when He giveth us, not an outward gift, but Himself? If there be one time above all others when it is meetest to sing hymns, it is when He and the eleven sang together in the supper-room at Jerusalem on the evening of that memorable Thursday, that night much to be remembered unto the Lord. A great saint has said that *one* communion well received is enough to make a man a saint; and we, brethren—we, my dear brethren, who have received it so often, what of us? Are we saints? Are we *like* saints? Are we even thoroughgoing penitents? We, who are always communicating—how is it we get so little out of our communions? how is it we are so little better than other men? I am sure we ought to be very much humbled; and to ask with all

possible earnestness, as well as all possible shame, what the reason is of this melancholy fact. Now, I think I can tell you in a great measure the reason. It is that we take pains, as is very right, to prepare beforehand for the communion; we take pains, as is very right, to behave ourselves reverently, with a heart of love and postures of loving fear *at* communion; but we take little or no pains to make solemn, formal thanksgivings after we have received.

We do not know it, we do not think it of ourselves, we should be pained to think it; but have we not something of the base temper of those beggars who are all humble entreaty before they get the alms they ask, but, when they have got it, turn on their heel with some poor word of thanks, very unlike their supplication either for heartiness or length, sometimes without a word of thanks at all, nay, sometimes criticising what they have received, as though it were not the sort of thing they wanted? I am afraid this is a likeness of ourselves. At best, we think coming to the sacrament is like coming to a king's court: we must dress ourselves to come, we must behave ourselves with scrupulous modesty and humblest attitudes, and set words and composed faces, while we are there; but, when once out of the palace doors, we may throw off all constrained manners as readily as we can take off our court-dress, and be at ease, walk here and there, speak and laugh, and enjoy ourselves among our equals. Well—coming to the Blessed Sacrament *is* like coming to a king's court, but the likeness will not hold good all through; and the great misfortune is, that people forget or deny this. We come to our King's court, but when we go away we do not leave

Him behind; we carry Him with us; we bear Him away within us; we and our King are one, He in us and we in Him. So that for men to cast off constraint, and feel at ease all at once after receiving the Blessed Sacrament, is the strangest thing imaginable. They have turned their backs upon the altar, that is true; they have not turned their backs upon the Lord's Body: but, alas! they do not discern where It is. This, you see, comes of false doctrine. We have plenty of books which tell us what to do *before* communion, but we have very few which tell us what to do *after* communion. People have made much ado about *preparation*, but little pains have been taken about thanksgiving. Books are very common about the Week Before; they are very scarce about the Week After—and this tells a sad tale. Men have first forgotten, and then come to deny, that "the Body and Blood of Christ are *verily* and *indeed* taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper;" and to pray that "we may so eat the Flesh of Jesus Christ, and drink His Blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by His Body, and our souls washed through His most precious Blood," would have sounded as very suspicious doctrine, if it did not happen, by God's mercy, to be in the prayer-book. So, falling from the high doctrine, men have also fallen from reverend practice. It could not but be so, brethren, however lamentable it may be. There is something even in a religious man's dealings with God, which in his dealings with his neighbour would be called selfishness, but which, towards God, is a profane hardening of the heart; it is that temper of earnest asking and cold thanksgiving, those many prayers and those few thanks, the ill

manners of a half-contented—mind, I do not say quite discontented, but—half-contented beggar. Ah! if we come to the Blessed Sacrament that we may have strength to go out with Jesus to the Mount of Olives, whether it be to the mount of earnest prayer, or the mount of humiliation and this world's cold look and bad word; or to the mount of suffering, of bodily pain, of outward persecution; or to the mount of ascension, of rising in loving communion and contemplation to God, of ascending from that low unsmooth mount, the bed of death,—if, I say, we come to the Blessed Sacrament, in order that we may get perseverance and spiritual freshness to go out with Jesus to that four-fold mount, between the Sacrament and the mount there must be the thankful hymn. If we leave that out, we lose the sweet application, the comfortable similitude, of that figure on the Thursday evening at Jerusalem.

Now, do think of what I have said. I have spoken gravely to you about it, my dear brethren, because I really think we are all of us in a great mistake in this matter; and the more I think of it the greater the mischief of the mistake, such a specially unsaintly mistake, appears. I have told you what to do *before* communion; I have told you how to behave *at* communion; now I shall try to give you a little advice as to what you should do *after* communion. And here, again, let us endeavour to learn what the practices of the saints have been. It would be quite a presumption in me to lay down rules of my own for you, and slight the recorded experiences of those blessed saints now with God in heaven. I had better far guide you by the counsels of the saints than lead you after my

own blind, awkward fashion. However, let me first of all say a few words about the prayers you might use, and the length of time you should use them. I made your preparation to begin on Friday night, to occupy that night's prayers, Saturday morning's, and Saturday evening's; and Sunday morning was to be taken up with realizing that saintly, self-emptying temper of mind which is fittest for a communicant: so let us now turn the same order backwards, and give it the same time. Let the remainder of Sunday be taken up with realizing some one of the saintly tempers fit for one who has just received the Lord's body, and is one with his Lord—which tempers I will describe presently. Then on Sunday night say the 103rd Psalm, "Praise the Lord, O my soul," which you will find full of beautiful applications to the Blessed Sacrament, and the believer's union with his Lord accomplished and brought to pass therein; and after the 103rd Psalm, say the collect at the end of the Communion Service, "Almighty and everlasting God, we most heartily thank Thee." On Monday morning say the same Psalm and the same collect again, as if Sunday were not yet finished, and that you, who are a communicant, have, as it were, a double Sunday; and on Monday evening, when the first day's work of the hard week is past, show that, for all your labour and for all your worldly cares, your heart is still with Jesus, and that, though the world and the life we must live in the world are unclean, soiling things, you have an altar in your souls; and that you have not taken the white linen of Sunday off it yet, and for all its whiteness it is not soiled. On Monday evening, I say, in token of all this, repeat the same 103rd Psalm and the same collect, "Almighty and everlasting God, we most

heartily thank Thee;" and then, as you undress and go to bed, with careful tender thoughts undress the altar in your soul, and fold its white napkins up in such a quiet, grave way, as though you were folding up those grave-clothes which had touched his Holy Flesh, and lay so orderly in His tomb on Easter morning. Friday night will soon come round again, and then you will begin once more to clean and dress the self-same inward altar.

You see I have not laid much upon you in the way of formal prayer, because I know too well how little modern habits of life, whether among the rich or the poor, agree with any thing like lengthened devotion, or tolerate any thing like interruption of work and business during the course of the day. But I am most confident that, if the very little which I have prescribed were faithfully carried out, you would soon begin to find that frequent communion was bringing forth more abundant fruit than I fear it does now. However, should any of you desire any addition to this, in order to employ the leisure moments of Sunday afternoon, what better exercise could you have, in the way of vocal prayer, than saying those same six Psalms (113—118) which our blessed Lord and the eleven said after the first of all communions that Thursday evening in Jerusalem? They take but a few minutes to say; yet, if said with a fervent heart, it could hardly fail but that sweet verses would rise up and stop your prayers, and carry your mind gently out into sacred meditation, feeding your understanding with heavenly thoughts, and heating your will with divine love, and putting fresh life into your holy resolutions: and this, all the more, if you remember that God is in you of a truth; so that in a real sense it is He as well as you, as it was He

with the eleven of old, who is offering up in you and with you to the Eternal Father the prayers and praises of those six Psalms, the very pattern of a Christian thanksgiving, falling off from hallelujah to the deep woes of the dear and awful passion, and rising as often from the mention of those gracious woes to outbursts of joyous praise and renewed hallelujahs.

But now to go back to the employment of the day on which God has mercifully bestowed Himself upon you. I made much of your realizing a particular saintly temper of mind *before* you approach the altar; you were to come with an honest and contented confession of your own nothingness, and offer yourself as an empty thing, in order that Jesus might fill you to the brim with His heavenly benediction. Now, *after* communion, I wish you also to realize some saintly temper of mind. This need not be done in set formal prayer; it may be done in moving about and performing such duties as you have to do, which however, on Sundays and the greater feasts, are for the most part few and soon discharged. You should keep one thing in your mind, continually draw your thoughts that way, lift up your heart to God full of that feeling, and do your best to keep your mind in that one posture till bed-time. I will give you a few examples of the way in which the saints indulged the sweet varieties of their thankful souls. Some gave God thanks for their redemption, and went over and dwelt upon the chief mysteries of our blessed Lord's three-and-thirty years. Others thought of the creation, the angels, the stars, the earth, the trees, the flowers, the beasts, the insects, and called on them to join in one concert of praise to the Majesty on high: these found the song of the three

children, "O, all ye works of the Lord," and the last three Psalms, the natural expression of their thankfulness. Others again thought they could not do better than dwell on God's love, and do all they could to excite their own love of the holy Trinity: this might be a dangerous practice to any who do not follow the counsel of a spiritual guide in their religious exercises. Others have realized very strongly that Christ was in them and they in Him, and therefore that in some great sense He was praying their prayers in them: and so they have taken that opportunity of asking for special graces and perfections, such as a single life, poverty, being kept from honours, being thought ill of, being falsely accused of great sins, and the like; as if the humble boldness of asking such unworthy gifts were of itself a kind of thanksgiving. Others, we read, have pictured to themselves Jesus Christ coming into them, as on a court day, to receive the honour and homage of their five senses, who are His tenants in their souls; and they make each sense come before Him, sitting on the throne of their hearts, and thank Him for its creation, confess its own rebelliousness, beg for pardon, and ask for grace to help the soul with more punctual faithfulness in its spiritual life. Others picture to themselves their own interior as a miserable hospital, wherein all the senses, passions, powers, wishes, hopes, and fears are diseased with all manner of offensive diseases; and Jesus enters this sad hospital as the true physician, touching and healing all the sick, as He did of old in the Holy Land. These specimens, which I have taken out of a devotional book, will show you what kind of tempers the saints endeavoured to realize after communion, and will enable you to invent many such for your-

selves. Of course, you will see that the more you can be alone for an hour or two after communion the better; still, this is not always possible; but anyhow, it would be well for all, when they first get to their own houses, to retire for a few minutes before joining the rest of the family. You may do much in this short time, more than you think for, especially if you keep to it and make a habit of it. You will soon come to talk little on such days, and you will be surprised to find how much telling your feelings hinders you from feeling deeply: when you tell them to others you part with most of your power to *realize* them within yourself. You will soon come also to love retirement, whether you can have it or not: and to love retirement when you are really unable to have it, seems to have somewhat of the same gifts given to it as are given to actual retirement for holy meditation. All these things will soon come to pass in their measure; and then we shall find frequent communion working wonders in our souls, almost as much beyond our hopes as they are most certainly beyond our deservings.

What temper—brethren, I am speaking on an awful subject—what thoughts, think you, were hers who for nine months went up and down on earth, into the hill country, along the street, and elsewhere; haply, to the well, to the field, to the household toils—for she was poor—bearing in her virginal womb our ever-blessed Lord? How collected, how calm, how stayed on God, how overshadowed by her own reverent thoughts, how joyous, and, as joyous people are, how inconceivably humbled by the favour! Very far off, let us try to copy this; let us, for the rest of the day at least, act gently and speak little, but converse with Jesus in our hearts—

act gently and speak little, for fear of venial sins: a *venial* sin makes sad havoc on a communion day. "Take us the foxes, the *little* foxes that spoil the vines: for our vines have *tender* grapes." Ah! in good truth, a venial sin makes sad havoc on a communion day.

V.

SPIRITUAL COMMUNION.

Jesus met them, saying, All hail: and they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him.—St. Matt. xxviii. 9.

How quiet is heavenly love, and yet how restless too! Outwardly it seems a keen, uneasy thing; its repose is all inward; its calmness does not often come to the surface, except in the saints whose peaceful manners are mostly so winning. But, outwardly, love has the hunter's eye, and the hunter's untiring foot; it goes up and down the world looking for the footprints of Jesus, whom it loves; it does not give up its search for weariness, and so it finds Him at the last; and, when it finds Him, like the women on Easter morning, it holds Him by the Feet and worships Him. This is the searching temper of love; it seems to forget hope; it seems to go a-head of faith: but when it finds, faith and hope come up with it, and all three repose in the worship of Him who has allowed Himself to be overtaken by them. "By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth: I sought Him, but I found Him

not. The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye Him whom my soul loveth? It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found Him whom my soul loveth: I held Him, and would not let Him go."

Ah! my dear brethren, what artifices have not the saints hit upon to hold Jesus by the Feet, like the women on Easter morning! what little affectionate formalities, which the world would laugh at and the self-righteous criticize, have they not devised to find their Lord, and keep Him when they have found Him! what curious skill have they not brought to bear upon the service of Jesus, till they have made, not only a science of it, but a craft, a trade! O let us go and serve as apprentices to the saints; let us serve our time with them, that we may have our eternity with Jesus: let us learn how to search for Jesus, how to find Him, how to know Him when we have come up with Him, how to keep our spirits up when He disappears for awhile, how to hold Him by the feet and delay His disappearing! Now I am going to speak to you to-day of *one* of the arts which the saints have made use of in order to hold Jesus by the Feet; it is called Spiritual Communion. We have already seen that our Blessed Lord is nowhere so present with us on earth as in the Holy Sacrament; that He gives us no gift so great as the gift of Himself in that comfortable ordinance; that there is no act of our lives so solemn as the receiving of His Body at the altar. But we cannot always be communicating; we are not fit for it, or we are busy, or we have not the means offered us where we are. Yet the oftener we receive it the more we hunger after it again: it makes our appetite the keener even while it satisfies us; nay,

if I may so speak, it satisfies us by making us the more hungry. The saints found this; they saw how good was the longing which the soul had for this heavenly Food; they were covetous of all good wishes, as knowing that they came only from the Blessed Spirit; they feared to waste in mere feeling this spiritual desire, and so, through their affectionate craft, they made a sweet and helpful formality of it, and called it Spiritual Communion. It is this which I am going to speak to you about.

It is of course a great comfort to the sick and dying, especially to those who are unable to receive the Blessed Sacrament because of the weakness of their stomach, and their loathing for food. It would be an unpardonable irreverence in a priest knowingly to give it to them for fear of some indignity. On this account it is that at the end of the service for the Communion of the Sick there is the following rubric:—"But if a man, either by reason of extremity of sickness, or for want of warning in due time to the Curate, or for lack of company to receive with him, or by any other just impediment, do not receive the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, the Curate shall instruct him that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and stedfastly believe that Jesus Christ hath suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed His Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and giving Him hearty thanks therefore, he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth." This is Spiritual Communion: you see how distinctly, and it would seem almost boldly, the Church teaches it; and how plainly too her

language makes it appear that it is a special privilege of those only who receive the Blessed Sacrament when they can, and who, when by some "just impediment" they cannot, have from God most earnest desires after it—desires so earnest as by some inward, mysterious supply to be effective. However, I am to speak of it now, not so much as a consolation to the sick and feeble, as a pious exercise of holy living—a sacred artifice, if I may so speak, whereby to hold Jesus by the Feet.

There are three doors by which God is pleased to enter the souls of His creatures in a natural way, the Memory, the Understanding, and the Will. By Memory we realize our own past sinfulness and ingratitude, and so excite contrition; and by Memory too we picture to ourselves, in a living and impressive way, the great acts and mysteries of our Blessed Saviour's Life. Having thus brought them before ourselves, the place, the persons, the words, the deeds, our Understanding explains them, reasons upon them, makes reflections, and draws conclusions. And then, lastly, the Will, taking fire at the knowledge which the Understanding has gained, becomes inflamed with the love of Jesus, and in its heat makes earnest prayers, and fervent resolutions of amendment, and acts of union with God. This is the meditation of the saints, so very much neglected among ourselves, and an exercise of immense importance in the spiritual life, and very full of sweetness. I shall say nothing more of this at present: some of you are trying to learn it, and would only be hindered by my entering further into it now. But *something* like this will be necessary for Spiritual Communion, as I shall proceed to show you. We must all feel that we are very unreal, that the times them-

selves are specially unreal. By unreal, I mean that we do not say what we mean, nor mean what we say; that we act as if man's eye was the only eye which saw us; that we make an unnecessary, exaggerated profession while our practice is scanty and low; and, lastly, that we have got a sort of notion that spirituality is, as it were, something in the air, and not a real, intelligible, formal thing which we can lay hold of, learn, and then make use of. Now, our blessed Lord and Saviour was and is True Man, and lived three-and-thirty years upon the earth, and did many things, and left some of them written in the Gospels; and herein I think we shall find our best remedy against being unreal and hypocritical in times when it is very difficult not to be both the one and the other. This is the reason why I have dwelt so much all the year round on the three-and-thirty years. Devotion to our Blessed Lord's Human Nature, a strong and even painful realizing of His Bodily Sufferings, a special fixing of the thoughts on all He said and did as Man—all this keeps our religion from being vague, unsettled, dreamy, fickle. With this devotion faith seems to mean so much more, hope to travel so much more directly to its end, and love to find God so much more readily, that it seems the very remedy for the false, unreal ways into which we have fallen, or are falling. So I put forward Spiritual Communion here as particularly important, in that it helps us so distinctly to realize the Human Nature of our Lord, and to picture Him lovingly to ourselves: and was not this one end why He became Man? Neither let us be afraid of this special devotion to our Lord's Human Nature leading us from that doctrine, so absolutely necessary to salvation, that He was also Very God, of one substance with the

Father. This fear once came across the mind of an eminent saint who felt inwardly drawn to this particular devotion; but she soon discovered that the fear was an illusion of the devil, and that the Saviour's Divinity was of necessity by none so honoured as by those who paid a special reverence to His Sacred Manhood. I have said this in order to explain to you why I have always dwelt with such minuteness upon the Gestures, Expressions, Sorrows, and Pains of our Blessed Lord. To have Him steadily before our eyes the day through, pictured on the air, moving before us, mixing in the companies which we frequent, like a silent star seen through the branches of the wood as we walk—this would indeed be a wonderful restraint from sin, a mighty quickening of love, a wholesome purifying and refreshing of faith: and Spiritual Communion is an easy and surely a sweet way of approaching to something like this.

Well, now—perhaps what I have said has been a little hard; only I know there are some who need to have it said to them; what follows shall be easy enough.

A great saint, who saw clearly the intimate connection which there is between the Blessed Sacrament and a holy life, advises those who communicate weekly to give three days to a careful preparation for, and a happy expectation of, the coming of our heavenly Guest, and three days afterwards to fervent thanksgiving for His gracious visit. By this means, not the whole week only, but the whole life of a man was divided between preparing to receive, receiving, and giving thanks for the Blessed Sacrament. Something like this we may attain by the practice of Spiritual Communion.

We aim at something like the life of St. Anna, who departed not from the temple, but served God there, with fastings and prayers, night and day. Like the Blessed Virgin and the apostles in the ten days between Ascension Day and Whit-Sunday, we depart not from the holy Supper-room, but are shut up there in prayer, and sacred meditation, and spiritual union with Jesus. Let us see how this is to be; and, if it be easy, how sad to slight what must be so full of grace, or to put it at the lowest, so sweetly moving to our sluggish affections!

The whole life of our Blessed Lord was one continued Sacrament; it was one unbroken Communion Service, whose celebration lasted three-and-thirty years. He was ever offering up His consecrated Self to the Eternal Father; He was ever communicating His consecrated Self to men; He was a Sacrament while He was a Sacrifice; He was a Sacrifice while He was a Sacrament. O let us take a little pains to honour the Sacred Manhood of our Lord, by imitating in our childlike way this sacramental life of His! It was on the Thursday evening before He suffered, that He solemnly and formally instituted the Blessed Sacrament of His Body and His Blood. Now, my dear brethren, I think it will give a freshness to your religious exercises, an interest to your week, a renewal to your fervour—it will make a kind of holy-day, a sort of second Sunday of your Thursday, if you were to set aside some portion of every Thursday evening to the devout practice of Spiritual Communion. The way to set about it might be this.

Going to the place where you most commonly say your prayers, kneel down, and say in silence the Lord's Prayer. Then, closing your eyes, in order that no out-

ward sights may distract you, picture to yourself the Supper-room at Jerusalem on that Thursday evening, lighted up for a feast. Our Blessed Lord is there, and His disciples—the bold St. Peter, the loving St. John, St. Andrew, and St. James, the four that were more highly favoured than the rest. There, too, are the other seven or eight; for you may conceive of Judas as being there or not being there, just as you find the traitor's presence or absence most to further and keep quiet the course of your meditation. Imagine that our Lord is making preparation to administer the Blessed Sacrament; and of course you dare not look up to watch Him, but you bow your head, and think, How wonderful is this! What proof can I have more sweet, or yet more satisfying, than this of the truth of my religion? Here is a solemn form, first celebrated at Jerusalem in a private room one Thursday evening; the witnesses only eleven or twelve poor unlearned men; the Master reputed only to be a carpenter's son:—yet now this form is over all the world; thousands and thousands of churches are built in honour of it; and, in order to provide for its more beautiful celebration, kings and nobles, priests and scholars, no less than poor cottagers, receive it kneeling. How could this be if it were not from God? If ever the devil tries to disquiet me, by filling my head with doubts, the very sight of an altar ought to satisfy me that the Catholic faith is true beyond all manner of doubt. But this is the very form, the account of it, the very doctrine most spoken against, denied by the world, perverted by misbelievers, profaned by false disciples. O how great a thing must it really be when it has so shaken the whole world, so troubled the minds of men, caused such innumerable

books to be written, made Christians so angry one with another! Surely I cannot reverence it too much; for all these things, however sad and shocking, are only fresh proofs that it is an unworldly, unearthly thing. But the minds of the saints have not been troubled about it, at least not made angry; their trouble has been either a loving sorrow at men's ungrateful quarrelling about it, or else it has been a sweet trouble of vehement love, which has made them almost beside themselves. These are they with whom I wish to throw in my lot. O what a bold thing it is for me to say so! it would be an unpardonable boldness if I did not hope that Jesus would mercifully make it come true. One way, then, in which I can feel what the saints felt, and do what they did, is to think and think how men have abused the love of Jesus in this Sacrament, and have not, as St. Paul expresses it, *discerned His Body*, till my heart is stirred, and I wish, humbly yet very heartily, that I could do something to make it up to my dear Lord and Saviour, to repair the outrages which rough, cold, heartless men have offered to His Sacred Heart. I am not learned; I cannot write books to make men think more truly than they do: indeed, I hardly believe books *can* make men turn from false doctrines to true ones. I am not rich or noble, so that I can show men in any costly or magnificent way my intense reverence for the Blessed Sacrament; but one thing I can do, I can show Jesus my intense sorrow for the unworthy insults He has received by honouring His Sacrament, honouring it by frequent receiving, by painstaking preparation, by heartfelt thanksgiving—I will show it to Him by the practice of Spiritual Communion, which is as much as saying to Him that I hunger so for His Divine Food that I can-

not receive it often enough in church, but am obliged with hungry love to receive it in thought at other times.

You may make, brethren, some such meditation as this while you imagine our Lord preparing every thing: one Thursday you may think such thoughts as you can fancy the bold St. Peter would have thought if the whole history of the Church had been before his eyes; another Thursday you can think such thoughts as would have been more likely to rise in the tender mind of the loving St. John; another Thursday you can put yourself in the place of the simple-minded Andrew; or another Thursday you can be St. Thomas, who afterwards doubted of our Lord's glory, or St. Philip, who had been so long time with Jesus without knowing who He was: and so you may piously vary this exercise exceedingly, always of course remembering how very far we are from any one of those Eleven, whose thoughts we are only trying to enter into in order to grow a little more like them. Or, again, this delightful exercise may be varied in other ways. While the preparations are going on, you may in spirit pass amid the streets of Jerusalem, crowded with the influx of strangers to keep the Passover: there is much confused talk about Jesus and His mighty works, especially His raising Lazarus; but the wicked priests have their secret—the band of soldiers is getting ready, and Judas is expected to make the last arrangements for his awful treason. How little does that crowded city dream of what is going on in that Supper-room! Yet the Church is always in the world as that Supper-room was in the middle of the thoughtless city: many notice her not at all; they who notice her, without loving her, leave her not alone, but are

secretly conspiring against her. Or you may follow in your imagination the Blessed Virgin, somewhere in Jerusalem, or perhaps out at Bethany, and think of what St. Simeon said of her three-and-thirty years ago, when Christ was presented in the temple. Or you may visit in spirit the silent Mount of Olives and the quiet garden, which in a few hours is to be the scene of such tremendous deeds; or climb the Mount of Calvary, and think of three o'clock to-morrow afternoon. Indeed, there is in the Gospels sweet store of change for these affecting meditations: what I have hinted will but suggest much more. The object of the whole exercise is of course to get at the love of Jesus, by vividly realizing the times and places of His Sacred Humanity.

After some meditation of this sort, which will only occupy a few minutes, and which may be shorter or longer according to the love and inward sweetness which it may please the Holy Ghost to shed abroad in your heart, you may with deepest reverence imagine our Blessed Lord to have finished all His gracious preparations; to have broken, to have blessed, to have consecrated His Holy Body and Blood; and the apostles to be kneeling on their knees in a reverent, wondering joy. You also are, as it were, present *in spirit* at the scene: you too are kneeling on your knees; you too in a reverent, wondering joy. Our Blessed Lord passes from one to another, stooping to give to each the unspeakable Gift; and to you He approaches, last of all, least of all, less than the least of all, as being unworthy even to realize in thought what you actually enjoy at the altar in church —to you He comes last of all. Then raise your head, but unclose not your eyes, and say to Him, in a low voice, some short prayer out of Scripture, which may

suit your feelings of extreme love and your pious resolutions, which I am sure must by this time be freshly kindled; let it be some verse of the Psalms, or, if it please you, those words of Esau, "Feed me, I pray Thee, with that same red pottage, for I am faint." Then be silent, and believe, as the Saviour passes by you, that you have indeed in spirit been touched by the healing hem of His Sacred garment, and that the myrrh, aloes, and cassia gave out a smell whereby thou art made glad.

The hymn, the Mount of Olives, the treason, the buffeting, the scourging, the crowning, the Sentence, and the Cross—swiftly in thought you pursue Jesus through these rapidly succeeding sorrows; but He is too quick for you: you cannot "hold Him by the Feet;" your thoughts have no resting-place but in the mysteries of the Friday evening. So you had better pass on to the quiet mystery of His taking down from the Cross; then you may profitably consider the sweet mystery of His Sepulchre. Your Body is His Tomb wherein He deposits His sacred Body for its resurrection. Ah! is that inward tomb new for Him? has it no savour of the old Adam once laid there? is it hewn in the hard consistency of rock? are there the clean linen-cloths of a carefully kept chastity? is there the white napkin of compassion for His sorrow, embracing and hiding the many purple punctures of the thorns? are there the spices of diligent penitential preparation? is the stone seat for the angel ready? and is there by this time so much as a movement betokening the resurrection to good works? Let this meditation occupy you a little while; then say the words, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

This may be one form of Spiritual Communion. I merely give it you as a suggestion. It would occupy from ten minutes to a quarter of an hour, but might be prolonged much beyond that if you felt drawn by an inward facility. You know, brethren, the reality—shall I call it the awful or the consoling reality, or rather both at once, the one because the other?—of the Gospel means of grace; and this being so, let us not so much as inquire what *kind* or what *degree* of grace may be given to this practice. We shall find many common, obvious, and intelligible advantages of it; let us keep to them, and keep to nothing else. God is very good, He is *very* good: this is what we shall say of Spiritual Communion, when we have tried it a little while.

One lesson you will soon learn; and that is to pray in the favourite fashion of the saints. To take Christ and His Merits wholly as your own, and after that loving robbery to give them back to God the Father, with an unblamed ostentation of service: Take Thy Lord's Mouth to pray with, and His Heart to love with, His Austerities to do penance with, His Blood to satisfy with, His Body to do Sacrifice with—take His Cross and offer it to the Father, only thou must carry it there thyself: it is heavy at first, but at times it is strangely lightened, as if angels put their hands between thy shoulder and its sharp edge, or held up the end that drags heavily behind—unite thyself and thy poor doings with the infinite merits of Jesus, and so pay thy long debt unto the Father—offer up to Him the Cross thou canst not carry, and yet art helped to carry, the Wounds wherewith thou wert not wounded—O that thou wert now wounded with them in thine heart!—the Crown wherewith thou wert not crowned, the blood thou didst

not shed, the Nails, all four, of Baptism, Confirmation, Vocation (whatever it be), and First Communion, wherewith Christ once nailed thee to His Cross: and how comes it that now thou art unfortunately free? Thou art not dead unto the world or to thyself; who then hath taken thee down prematurely from the Cross?

VI.

FREQUENT COMMUNION.

He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.—St. Matt. xxiv. 13.

My dear brethren, how unspeakably shocking—I am using quite sober words—how unspeakably shocking it would be if any of you who have now turned to God were to fall away from Him; and is it unlikely that some of you will do so? O *unlikely* is hardly the word to use, but I cannot bring myself to use one which would come nearer to the truth. Alas! I cannot express to you the anxiety which I feel about this matter; yet I do think it right not altogether to conceal from you the secret, painful, wearing fear which this gives me. The high view of duty is to do all as to God and not to man; to see that all is done rightly, and then not to care what becomes of it; and certainly they who can attain to realize this view will stand in but little danger of vain glory. But for the most part, and speaking of quite ordinary Christians, it is next to impossible to love those committed to our charge with a very yearning love, fully to know the extreme sinfulness and neighbourhood of hell out of which a soul has been drawn, to

have watched with delight the growing conquest over besetting sins and the budding forth of many amiable graces, and then to see the whole work blighted, the soul worse than ever, sins fouler and more deliberate, hell next to certain, and its past conversion turned from a blessing into an active curse—I say, it is impossible for an ordinary Christian to see this—nay, I will go further, to suspect it of any, to forbode it of any, without an anguish of heart extremely hard to bear from the way in which it darkens prayer, and oppresses natural cheerfulness, and breeds a very multitude of vexatious venial sins.

Can you yourselves conceive any thing more shocking than the case of a young man who is a backslider? He was living in the grossest impurity, in blasphemy, swearing, lying, hatred, theft, and drunkenness. He was almost hidden by the very multitude of his sins: what kind of a character he really was, how far there was any thing hopeful left about him, whether his heart was entirely hardened, how far the undoubted signs and plague-spots of reprobation were to be detected in the habitual malice of his sins, man's eye could not see: God alone knew His own creature. But in this condition, in this very hell upon earth, grace found him out—Christ glorified Himself by singling him out amid all the shamefulness of his sins. The fear of God fell upon him: in the agony of his horror for sin—agony of body as well as mind—he shrunk from no shame, he declined no hardship, he was not slow to take as true what the Church taught him. Christ's ordinances and Sacraments availed to his cleansing: he who but awhile ago loved unchastity now loved prayer; he who was a drunkard thought on

God; he who swore blessed God, and modestly edified his neighbours according to his knowledge. Uncharitable men doubted, thoughtless men wondered, worldly men smiled; but for all that the convert went on his way rejoicing. He learned to love God as well as to fear Him; he began to understand what it was to sympathize with the dear, sacred Sorrows of Jesus; he commenced the hard duty of daily examination of conscience, and because of the thought of God it was not irksome to him; he knelt at the altar, and was fervent there; he had got so far as to deny himself for Christ's sake, and to find that there was pleasure in the pain. The very angels rejoiced over it, and love went out from God, and the Spirit made His home within him. Where all this while was the Evil One? Not slumbering. All at once some little thing went wrong, some doubt which no pains were taken to clear up, some offence which had no real meaning in it, some fault which it would not have been so very hard to find mercy for; and the shame of confession, which seemed so light a thing at first, so natural, so desirable a self-revenge, now seemed unendurable, and was kept at arm's length. The conscience which had before been open was now closed, and the health of the whole soul became disordered. The old sins came creeping back to their old homes, like beasts at daylight to their dens; and the young man was once more on the broad road, walking right into the mouth of hell as if it were the doorway of his house; and the preacher was sick at heart in secret, and the Church was weakened, and the world was scandalized, and the angels mourned, and the Spirit grieved, and the Blood of Jesus was trampled on, and the Father

dishonoured before the face of His own Creation. Was it not unspeakably shocking?

And why was all this? Because he did not persevere, because, most likely, he never asked for perseverance. This sounds very common-place, but it means something which I wish you very much to lay to heart, in order to prevent backsliding. Perseverance is not at all like anything else in religion; it is a special gift of itself, and by itself, and does not seem connected with any other Christian grace whatsoever. If this be true it is a very important remark, and it is of extreme importance to come at the full understanding of it. What are called Christian graces and virtues generally go all, or nearly all, together: a man who excels in one is not destitute of the others; he may be, and every good man will be, *eminent* in one or other grace, but he will have a measure for all if he is a growing, consistent Christian. A humble man can hardly help being chaste: a single eye will bring a simple tongue along with it: joy and peace are never separate in reality, though they may be in seeming: and so with all graces. Perhaps we do not mention them all, or ask them all in our prayers: we ask what we most want, and the rest comes along with it. Now, this is not true of *perseverance*: nothing brings it; it comes in company with nothing; it is never numbered in the retinue of any other grace; it is a *special gift, and must be specially asked for.* The experience of the saints has proved this curious truth beyond all doubt. I call it *curious*, because men do not seem to find it out for themselves, neither does it recommend itself as true when it is first stated; but when it is thought upon for awhile, and a man is some-

what grown in that new wisdom which examination of conscience teaches him, it seems so natural to acknowledge that perseverance is a special gift, requiring special prayer, that men wonder they did not make more of it before. St. Paul, notwithstanding his long habits of virtue and self-restraint, says that he still chastised his body, lest, after he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway. Our Saviour twice repeated that he only that endured to the end should be saved. It is faith whereby we stand: it is grace wherein we stand. And what comes of this doctrine? Why, that habits can never make us safe in religion; that they are not to spiritual acts what they are to moral acts. Nay, I will go further—and some awful instances in church history warrant me—and I will say, that after years of habitual correspondence to divine grace, men, who would have been called saints, have fallen *all at once*, and not into little, but into gross and deadly sins; as if the greatness of a man's height before only increased the impetuosity, and so the depth, of his fall. A bow will start all the more one way for its having been strained the more violently the other way just before. And why is this? Because, as I maintain, the gift of perseverance is not a natural thing, but wholly a gift, wholly from God, wholly above nature, and a gift, special, lying apart, to be had by special asking, never given into the bargain, so to speak, with other graces. It is not only above nature, but I do not believe it is grafted upon any thing natural, not, for instance, upon natural fortitude, or natural prudence, or natural fear; but a separate, special gift, wholly from God. An example or two will make what I say plainer. We may call the several Christian graces

the stones of our spiritual building, and then perseverance is the cement which binds them altogether, and in which they harden. We may call an holy life an ornament of the Bride of Christ, and then the virtues are the divers sorts of precious stones, and perseverance the gold in which they are set, keeping them from being lost, and setting them forth in edifying shapeliness and order.

A man who has been accustomed to generous diet, is so far from being able to fast more severely than another, that he is far more inconvenienced by it than one who has lived sparingly : so the more a man grows in grace the more he absolutely needs perseverance, the more disastrous is his fall when he does fall; partly because his nature was the more bent and restrained before, and partly because such a one is usually exposed to very special assaults of the Evil One. To do God's will is the soul's food, and the longer it has been used to that heavenly diet, the more fatal and violent are the consequences of giving over that food : the fall of one grown in grace is generally startling, as much from its enormity as from its unexpectedness. So, in another sense, the Blessed Sacrament is the soul's food, and the longer and the oftener it has fed upon it the less can it do without it. Each fresh Communion is at once a thanksgiving for the last, a preparation for the next, and an increase of the holy hunger for frequent Communion. And this is what I have been bringing the matter to from the first.

Without perseverance all other gifts and graces are useless, both because they will not hold together on earth, and because they will stop short of heaven. But perseverance is a separate gift, a particular favour

from the King of kings, only granted upon special petition. Of course I am speaking of ordinary cases. There is an ignorance and a slow simplicity which a priest knows not how to deal with, but lays it daily with prayer at the feet of Him who can enter hearts and understandings unhappily without access to man. It would be wrongly burdening such consciences, indeed it would be simply untrue, to say that they must not omit to pray specially for special gifts else they would miss of them. God deals with such blunted understandings in the way which seems best unto Him; but, when I speak of holy living as a trade to be learned, I speak throughout of ordinary cases, and should shrink from using any such language as would appear to limit the merciful variety of God's ways, or the marvellous loving-kindness of His compensations. I speak to such of you as have had this world's wisdom to serve the world, and are now trying, with God's help, to turn that wisdom to an opposite account. I say, then, that it is of the greatest importance in all your daily prayers to pray for perseverance; and that frequent Communion is the surest and most appointed way of getting that special gift. Our perseverance must be daily; it must be our daily bread. But it is like the angels' bread, the manna which fell in the wilderness; God gives it in small supplies, one day's consumption at a time; they who go out in the morning to seek it gather much, but it is only a day's supply, or they gather little, and it is still a day's supply: so is perseverance, as was the manna in the wilderness. So specially should we pray for this special gift, that every time the clock strikes it were well to think of the judgment, and silently ask for perseverance to the

end. Always think, which is quite true, that you are unsafe in religion. You cannot stop in your prayers, you cannot sleep at your watch, you cannot turn round in your fight; it is on, and on, and on. You are always close upon falling; you are at best an insecure, overleaning wall. Grace is God's Hand; if He takes it away, it will fall to pieces; and He will not hold it there for long together if He is not asked. It is His blessed Will to be glorified of His creatures by being asked earnestly, importunately, unceasingly. He knows what we want, but He chooses to be told by us. He prepares His gifts, but He bids us take the gift ourselves from His bountiful Hand by prayer. If you wish not to fall away, you must make special prayer for final perseverance; and of all means to get it, frequent Communion has the most obvious fitness. Perseverance is a chain which holds our life together, and fastens it to the foot of God's throne, and the strongest links in the chain are Sacraments; for that mystery is a furnace of love, which can forge links of such a strength as no furnace of faith or of contrition, or any other half-earthly and half-heavenly thing can do.

Now, dear brethren, when people have been turning to God all round about us, is it not high time to speak of perseverance; and will you wonder that I should put it forward as the one most urgent reason for frequent Communion? If I were to do no more than add up and name the blessings of frequent Communion, the list would almost run beyond the limits of a sermon; and the gift of perseverance is the one which you most need to be reminded of. We are faint, and the Communion is our food; we are in temptations,

and there it is our stay; we covet to become pure, and it has a special power to give us purity, and cast out the spirit of uncleanness. We need changing from ourselves into Christ, and it is the Communion which transforms us into Him; we need to give Him back the will which He gave free to us, and the hand, wherewith in Communion He gives Himself to us, waits before it is drawn back, in order to receive our wills from us. The Communion is an acceptable offering to the Father of His dear Son's Passion; it is acceptable to the Son, because it is the setting forth of His own death till he come; it is acceptable to the Holy Ghost, because it is through Him and in Him that we offer it. If, then, needs be that we should please the Holy Trinity, needs be also that we should communicate frequently. We have spiritual necessities, the Communion is the supply of them; we have spiritual sicknesses, the Communion is the medicine of them; we have spiritual sorrows, the Communion is the consolation of them: we are poor, and it makes us rich; blind, and through it we see; lame, and we walk leaning on it; naked, and by it we are clothed; hungry, and by it we are filled with a hungry fulness; dead, and by it raised to life again. O, books might be written on all these things, and the lesson of all the books would but be, that we should be frequent at Communion!

But I wish you to think of it at present, brethren, as the chief appointed means for getting the gift of final perseverance. Lord, *evermore* give us this Bread! To do the will of God is the food of the soul; to go on doing God's will to the day of our death, is what we call final perseverance: but the Communion is also the

food of the soul, and why? because in it we get the strength to do God's will: and the Communion is also the chief means for getting final perseverance, and why? because in it we keep renewing our strength for our renewed duties. A man is strong and well because of the regular sustaining food on which he lives: but, let him be strong ever so many years, he cannot get the habit of being strong without food; as he begins to starve himself so strength begins to fail, and with strength life, and that in no long time. So is it with perseverance and the Communion; the very use of food is its continuance, its daily making good the strength which the labours of the day consume. To come once to Communion is a reason for coming a second time; to come often is a reason for coming oftener—nay, it lays us under a necessity of coming oftener. Some days we may not be tempted to judge our neighbours, and so for those days we may not need a fresh supply of charity; some days we may not be tempted to pride, or to anger, or to impurity, and so have no cause *specially* to pray for humility, meekness, or chastity; but we want perseverance all days, and all days alike. It is the food—not of earth—in the strength of which we are to labour each day, and after each night's sleep to require it again. Perseverance is not being humble, or prayerful, or meek, or sober, or chaste, or obedient, or self-denying; but it is a going on being all those things to the day of our death. Surely it is plain then that perseverance must be made a subject of special prayer, and must be sought in frequent Communion. O, my dear brethren, seek it there! and then, through God's mercy, we shall not have to mourn over the relapse of those,

the sweet earnestness of whose pious beginnings fills us with a timorous thankfulness and an affectionate alarm.

One word, in conclusion, to those of my parishioners who are trying to live strict lives, and yet are not frequent communicants, and do not feel as if it was right they should become so. Dear brethren, if you have come to this resolution in prayer, and after an honest examination of conscience, I doubt not you are quite right in your decision; and I hope you will not feel troubled at my urging frequent Communion on others, as if it implied the least condemnation of you: I should be sorry if you thought it did. I dare say the work which you see going on around you is a subject of anxious thought with you, of some grave doubts, and of a very reasonable and charitable perplexity. But do not distrust it, brethren; God will maintain Himself and His ways. We must none of us ever forget that God has many and almost opposite ways of guiding souls. It is both stupid and wicked to do as some do—to say that others are not in a state of grace, because they have not the same symptoms of grace as themselves. They had better leave off judging; they had better leave off this miserable clambering up into Christ's judgment-seat. They know not what God is doing in any heart; they will be losing their grace by doing what their Saviour forbids them to do, that is, by examining another's title to be in the same grace as themselves. God leads souls very differently. Some He leads more in a moral way than others, as is the case with you who fear Him, and yet do not feel it right to be too familiar with the ordinances and Sacraments of the Church.

Others, as those you see around you, He leads more in a spiritual way, by many inward struggles with old immoral habits, and by strange bye-ways of temptation; and those He allures rather to prayer and to the spiritual mysteries of the Church, and to close, unspeakable union with their Lord in the venerable Sacrament. But do not either of you judge the other: the moral and the spiritual way may not be the same at first, but they will run into one before the end, for all such as have an honest purpose. But, brethren, many as are God's ways of leading souls, I do not find that these two things are mentioned in Scripture as making up one of His ways—a *boastful* assurance that men are in a state of grace, and a judging that others are not so: I *do* find both these things in Scripture; but they are mentioned there with severe and heavenly truth as miserable sins. O come down, come down from off that empty judgment-seat of God's; ye know not at what hour He will come to fill it: what if He find you clambering up and sitting there, you who ought to be busy with your own sins, mimicking your Maker's judgment of the world!

You must not think then, brethren, that I consider frequent Communion a mark of who is in a state of grace and who is not. Far from it. You who come seldom may for any thing I know—for I dare not pretend to judge the secret paths of the Spirit—be more advanced in the ways of religion than many of those who come often. They may require more support, as being weaker in religion; just as very strong medicines prove quite as much the critical state of the patient as his strength to bear them. Fever gives strength for a time, and men seem to live awhile in

the mere strength of fever: there may be something of that sort in spiritual matters. But God forbid that any outward ordinance, and far less any inward feeling outwardly expressed, should draw a real line between the good and the bad, the converted and the unconverted! Our Lord compares His Church on earth to a net containing both good and bad fish; but the separation is not made until the end of the world, and then it is the angels who are to separate them. Again, He compares it to a field of tares and wheat: both are to grow together, not to be separated into sects, classes, and divisions, boasting that the grace of God is with them alone. No! both tares and wheat are undisturbedly to grow together; and again it is the angels who alone shall distinguish them at the end. Ah! brethren, do not fall into this impious, ill-taught way of judging who is in grace and who not: look at death, what a diligent gleaner he is, going up and down the Lord's field, choosing and dividing, and gathering and binding up his bundles; let him do his work, do not cross his path: look at yourselves, manage your own consciences, busy yourselves with your own sins, hold your own secret converse with God: and think well of every one, and speak a good word of every one, and do a kind deed to every one; and I am sure, if Scripture be true, these three last things are the most undoubted marks of a state of grace: they are the very seals of the Holy Ghost! Brethren, I know no misfortune which could befall the Church, more practically grievous, than that it should be supposed that the Sacraments and ordinances of the Church brought out upon the surface, and made visible to men's eyes, that hidden line which God has so studiously buried

deep with the Hand of His own Providence—that secret line between good and bad, the real and the unreal, the genuine and the counterfeit, the elect and the reprobate, the clear knowledge of which in this life would end the world before its time through the very force of misery and madness.

VII.

JESUS PRESENT AND NOT KNOWN.

He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them: and their eyes were opened, and they knew Him: and He vanished out of their sight.—St. Luke, xxiv. 30, 31.

Ah! so, brethren, it often is in this poor world. There is no abiding enjoyment here, not even in religion. Jesus Himself does but come and go: we seek Him, and we find Him not; we seek Him, and we find Him soon, or we find Him late; we find Him, and He is gone again; He has not waited for us to lay hold of His Feet or to say a word to Him; He has vanished out of our sight. Then He comes back, but it is unawares; He appears in "another form" to us as we walk; but we do not know Him. When He leaves us, then it is He shows Himself to us, shows Himself for a moment, and vanishes, leaving our hearts hot within us, and we are full of loving complaint at His so frequent disappearances—at the jealous concealment of His presence. We have wasted our time, so we think—we have wasted our time: *He* was with us, and we did not know Him. O we did not listen to Him as we should have done if we

had known it had been He; we did not fall down and worship Him; we did not ask a blessing; we have been with Jesus, and behaved no otherwise than if we had been with some common person! We think this, and we have a kind of holy vexation with ourselves. It shall not be so another time, so we go on thinking—it shall not be so another time: we will be more on our guard; we will find Him out by the artifices of love; we will seek Him in His own Blessed Sacrament, for there we know that we shall find Him: He cannot be absent there, and there surely we cannot mistake Him for any one else. We go there; we go with prepared hearts; we hear Him as it were knocking at the door of our hearts, which we have cleansed and adorned for His reception. O with what joy we rise to let Him in! and then, after all, it fares with us as with His Bride in the song of Solomon: "I opened to my Beloved; but my Beloved had withdrawn Himself, and was gone: my soul failed when He spake: I sought Him, but I could not find Him; I called upon Him, but He gave me no answer."

Such are the ways of Jesus with the loving soul—trying ways no doubt, and jealous ways, and hard to understand; yet, for all that, ways of love—ways most suited to our souls before the fight is done. This, then, is one lesson which I would have you learn from our Lord's three-and-thirty years on earth: men could be good men, and faithful, and hopeful, and loving, far more so than any of us, yet they could have Jesus with them, and not know it was Jesus till He was gone. In the garden on Easter morning, at Emmaus on Easter evening, on the shores of the sea of Genne-

sareth, Mary, and Cleopas, and John, and Peter did not find Him out at first; yet surely His Presence was a blessing to them. Now lay this to heart: Jesus can be present with us, really present, blessing us, absolving us, communicating with us, and yet our eyes may at His will "be holden" so that we do not know Him. I have given you one instance of this in what occurred at Emmaus on Easter Sunday evening; but it was in its measure so all the three-and-thirty years. It was a feature, a feature to strike us, in the Presence of Jesus, that men had it, and were mostly not aware, and at best only half-aware, that they enjoyed so great a privilege.

This then being so, let me warn you, brethren, against a scruple not uncommon among religious persons; let me warn you against being cast down and fancying you are not the better for Communion, because you did not *feel* any sensible sweetness and love at the time; let me warn you, not in Communion only, but in all your religious exercises, against looking for hot feelings, against trying to excite them, against putting *much* value upon them when you have them. I should hardly complete what I have to say about the Blessed Sacrament, if I omitted to give you this warning; and I found the warning on the fact that we find in the Gospels that people might have Jesus with them, and good people too, and yet not know Him; and also on the recorded experiences of the blessed Saints of the Holy Church. Some persons teach you that your prayer is not spiritual if you do not *feel* the Spirit, that your faith is in vain if you do not *feel* an assurance of salvation, that your sacraments are idle forms if you do not *feel* Jesus in you. Alas! where

was the sweetness of our Saviour's prayer on the Mount of Olives? where was His sensible consolation on the Cross, when He cried out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" where is there one word in all Scripture to support all this monstrous impiety of false doctrine? I do not wonder that the timid and the self-distrusting are cast down and filled with sad perplexity: this is indeed making wild, wild work with the blessed Gospel of our Lord—the Gospel of the poor in spirit and the single-hearted: this is indeed overloading and ensnaring the tender conscience, and turning religion into a very hot-bed of self-righteousness. O the deep simplicity and the simple sweetness of our holy faith! Why will not men let the little ones of Christ alone in the quiet belief of their child-like minds?

But now, brethren, warning you against this detestable and most immoral error, I would have you, in spiritual reading, in examination of conscience, in Communion, in prayer, or before Confession, carefully avoid looking for hot feelings, or trying to excite them, or putting much value on them when you have them.

First of all, *do not look for hot feelings.* One of the very first lessons in the spiritual life is, that we are to seek God and not ourselves. If we go before Him to humble ourselves for our past sins, what we seek is God's pardon; if we go to gain strength to improve in virtue, what we seek is God's grace; if we intercede for others, it is Christ's Cross that we plead on their behalf; if we frequent the Sacraments, it is real union with Jesus which we desire; if we perform our religious exercises, looking for hot feelings and inward con-

solations, it is plain that we seek not God, nor Jesus Christ, but our own pleasure, our own excitement, our own satisfaction. No actions whatever are pleasing to God, which are not done either with a pure intention or a humble endeavour to make our intention pure; but what intention can be more impure than that which, even in the solemnity of prayer and sacraments, seeks self rather than God, dictates to God beforehand what He shall give, bargains with Him how He shall pay us for our prayers, and serves Him only for the short-lived wages of sensible spiritual consolations? Surely we should approach the throne of grace in a far other temper than this; we should lay our wants at the feet of God, leaving Him to do as He pleases with us, knowing that His power is not more mighty than His wisdom, nor His wisdom than His love. "Abraham went out, not knowing whither he went;" this is the true temper of faith; and in nothing do we more need that temper than in our religious exercises. If you will not leave yourselves in God's Hands, He will never give you a full measure of His heavenly benediction; if you will not empty yourself, so far as may be, of yourself, you cannot hold His best gifts; if you value prayer from the sensible pleasure you take in it, and put a price upon it according to the hot feelings and inward consolations you have had in it, then are you utterly carnal, and not spiritual. You understand not our Lord's manner of prayer upon the Mount of Olives: you understand not His spiritual desertion on the Cross; you are ill-taught in the very alphabet of the spiritual life. If you have prayed hitherto, only looking for the pleasurable excitement of hot feelings, you have never

prayed a prayer yet which is worth the name of prayer.

Secondly, never try to excite hot feelings during your religious exercises. This is a worse mistake than that of looking for them beforehand. It is a want of submission to the will of God, and a wilful laying yourself open to the crafty delusions of the devil. We can do almost what we will with our feelings when we make strong efforts; and how infinitely shocking it would be to work ourselves up into an excitement in religion, when all the while it was unreal, brought about by our own carnal vehemence, not brought *to us* by the Holy Ghost! If we have prepared our hearts; if we have, with quiet reverence, tried to realize His Presence to whom we are praying; if we endeavour to drive away worldly or disturbing thoughts, and feel distressed when we cannot get rid of them; nay, if (as will sometimes happen) the very words of our prayers are taken out of our mouths, so that we cannot go on with them—still, for all this, let us remain quietly, humbly, and in patient suffering kneeling before God. It is a great thing to be allowed to kneel in His Presence, considering His infinite greatness, and our extreme vileness. His will be done in us, whatever it be. If He gives us sweetness, let us praise His holy Name for the helpful consolation; if He suffers us to remain in dryness, let us praise His holy Name for laying such a small punishment upon us, when we have deserved such great ones; nay, for sending us a trial like the trial of the saints, that we may find out how far off from the saints we are, and so humble ourselves all the more heartily in the confession of our own undeserving nothingness. Any how, let His will

be done; any how, let His Name be praised. But, on no consideration whatever, try to excite feelings which He does not give, in any violent, uncomposed way. The priests of Baal leaped and cut themselves with knives: the Lord's prophet was grave, solemn, and collected. Alas! the devil is nigh at hand in all religious excitements; and I will dare to say that many and many a fervour of prayer is from him, which passes for the work of the Holy Ghost, but is too ungentle, too familiar, too self-seeking to be His heavenly work. In all religious exercises *our* business is to avoid sin: all the rest we leave to God; all we want is that His will be done. The prayer on the Mount of Olives is our pattern: the more often and the more earnestly we ask for a gift, the more scrupulous should we be still to wish that God's will, not ours, be done; and if we be in an agony of dryness, distractions, fears, inward darkness, still we put Him before us who, so far from deserting prayer because of His pains, "being in an agony, prayed the more earnestly," with the more prolix endurance.

Thirdly, do not put much value on hot feelings when you have them. You may perhaps ask me, Is there then no good in these hot feelings, when they are the gift of God? Yes, certainly; they are helps in times of weakness; they are rewards for temptations manfully overcome; they are always pleasures, and sometimes, yet far from always, quicken love; and God's name be praised for them whenever they are granted. Nevertheless, as a general rule, and in no unthankful spirit, it is safe counsel which tells us not to put *much* value on them when we have them; and this for many reasons:—1. Because they are usually most given at the

outset of a man's conversion, and are like sweetmeats to children, which those grown in grace do not require: so that they are rather a humbling evidence of our low stature in Christ than a proof of high favour with God; 2. Because they are short-lived; 3. Because not to welcome them eagerly is the way to get them again; 4. Because it is very difficult to know when they are from God, and when they are self-seeking or illusions of the devil, and a mistake in such matters is dangerous; 5. Because they are of little importance compared with the great end of prayer, which is our advancement in solid virtues; and, 6. Because it is acceptable to God not to dwell upon or make too much of His sensible consolations, but to be *equally* content to go without them when it is His Will, inasmuch as you thus set forth in a very real loving way, that it is not His rewards that you seek but His Will, not yourself but His love, not His consolations but Himself. O this is hard to come to, but if we would be perfect we must attain to it. O how sad it is that the prayers of so many Christian men should be but selfishness and an unconformed will!

Now, brethren, apply what I have said to the Holy Communion; apply it for yourselves, and it will assuredly relieve you from any scruples which you may have from the want of sensible love and heated feelings in that divine ordinance. Indeed all this, which I have said more particularly about prayer, applies with even greater force to the Blessed Sacrament; for there, still more than in prayer, it is not ourselves that we seek, it is not even holy dispositions which we seek, but the Lord Himself. You will not, I am sure, turn my words into an excuse for coldness, or a making

light of reverent preparation, or even into an argument for not being pained at your dryness; for your pain about it is in itself no little sign of love, and I would not have you not be pained therewith. But I know that you have felt these scruples, and I have a horror—for I can use no lighter word—of your making experiments upon your soul, upon your feelings, upon your real love of God, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. O do realize the miserable sin of this! Think what it is you receive, and whatever you feel, be at peace, be still before Him, be overwhelmed with reverence and pious confusion of face; doubt not, strive not, resist not, put down every disquieting thought as certainly not from God, and again, I say, hush yourselves and be at peace. What can a sinner seek for more than the Presence of his God? shall he seek for *feelings* then and there? shall he seek when he has found—found what he surely sought for, not excited feelings, but the great and holy God? O, if the heart is in God's Presence, and is still seeking, still fretfully looking further, can it be right with that heart?

And while I am on this subject of scruples, I cannot but say how rejoiced I feel at the gradual spreading among you of the old and reverently fitting custom of receiving the Blessed Sacrament fasting, of letting the Lord's Body be the first thing which crosses your lips that day. Of course there are many who could hardly endure this (and be it remembered it is not with us of obligation) when the Sacrament is in the middle of the day: yet God seems wonderfully to strengthen those who try; and, when they are inconvenienced by it, the little suffering is but so much additional fuel to divine love. But to us, in our poor

advancement in grace, there is one use of approaching the Holy Table fasting, which I think it right specially to mention, and which may console those who at times feel dry and dead when they communicate. It may often happen from work, or business, or the excitement of some recent event, or our own habitual dulness in spiritual matters, that our preparation for the Blessed Sacrament may have been shorter and less diligent than we should wish, or our minds less disengaged from worldly affairs, and yet we may reasonably shrink from absenting ourselves from Communion. Now, in these cases I think we shall find a comfort in the pain of the previous fast, as it more or less compels us to think *why* we are fasting, and so whither we are going. It certifies us that we have not, as it were, *run* heedlessly out of the world into God's Presence; and further, we mostly find that it has subdued our feelings, and prepared us in our inward dispositions more than we should have expected. Certainly, as being a reverent self-denial, it makes us more quick to be caught and inflamed by holy joy; and the Communions which have had the most cheering sweetness in them, were often those to which we went fasting, but without any sensible relish for our heavenly food. Christ came upon us unawares, for we had been preparing for Him almost unawares ourselves.

But you still remain cold? you have thrown your hearts into that furnace of love, and they are not heated; they remain, as if by a melancholy miracle, black and cold? Still, remember that Jesus can be present, and yet not known: that was the truth with which I started: ponder it deeply, make much of it,

press it, and it will yield tender consolation to those whom God visits and purifies with this spiritual abandonment for awhile. Yes, dear brethren, I feel for your sufferings, I long to make them up to you; but still, though it sound like a poor play upon words, a very solid truth it is that God's abandonment may be God's visit too, a visit often more enriching the soul than the exciting sweetness of spiritual consolations. God's leaving you may be actually a proof that God is with you; it is a loving artifice: yet nature can show something like it; for do not friends at times pretend to quarrel in order to find out how much they love each other? Meanwhile stay yourself upon two thoughts, which I will give you. You have not felt love in your late Communions; but are you gone back in religion? do you give way to temptations more than you did? are you become slovenly in your examinations of conscience, your readings, and your prayers? If not, it is a great thing for a sinner like you to be kept where you are: perseverance is an immense thing. Of course I do not think you are only where you were; I do not think you *are* standing still: but you think so, and I take you at your word, and say you have no right to be cast down, if you are so much as standing still, and not sliding backward. It will come out in the end which of us was right: but never mind that now. The other thought on which to stay yourselves after dull Communions is this: see whether you do not get to bear affronts and keep your temper better than you did, whether you are not less quick to be heated when you are found fault with, whether you are not less vexed when others are preferred to you, whether you

do not pray for your enemies and slanderers with more heart, whether you are not *a little* more loving to those who are unloving to you. This is a very *special* fruit of Holy Communion: you may be sure it is temper of mind which you do not get elsewhere; you may be sure Jesus has been and left it with you as a token of His Presence, though you did not know when He came or when He went away. It is a token which cannot be counterfeited, and therefore you cannot be deceived; it is a piece of heavenly money with the Face of Jesus so stamped upon it that no evil angel, for all his mischievous wisdom, can do the like of it.

One hint may be given here, which will apply to all spiritual dryness whatsoever; it may seem a *little* thing, yet it is not the less helpful for being little. It is this: the inward temptations of the evil one may often be repelled by the use of *vocal* prayer, by speaking *out loud*, even though we may be alone; sometimes addressing God for help, sometimes as it were rebuking the tempter, sometimes reciting with a firm voice some portion of the Creed. This speaking out loud seems to stand us in good stead, partly as if the act made our resolve more solemn and formal, partly as if the outward expression succoured the inward resolve, partly as if by it we more realized the presence of God and our guardian angels, and partly as if there were a safety in thus assuring the evil spirits of our knowledge of their devices, and our manful determination to withstand them: for spiritual dryness too often leads to sadness, and sadness to despair, or at least to doubting of pardon. Sadness is a kind of mist which makes a man's past sins swell and look taller than they really are, just as a church tower in a fog, or in

the dull air of the fens, looks many feet higher than a correct measurement shows it really to be. To hide Christ's Cross is, as it were, to give a chill to the heart of the penitent: he becomes weary of strictness; his nerves are shaken: he can walk no further; he fancies that he can never be saved—that God never can have meant him to be one of the elect—that he is making no way—that there are no signs of his being accepted—that it is in vain to persevere. O how this wretched feeling steals over a man, especially if he is in ailing health, and bears his ailing health impatiently! O that men in this sad condition would lean rather upon the Creeds of their mother Church than on their own delusive experiences and uncertain feelings! If they would but say out loud, hoping against hope, believing against feelings, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the Forgiveness of Sins," how many times would the devil flee from them at the very sound of the holy syllables; and as the heart so often is master to the lips, and teaches them what good things they ought to say, so sometimes, when the heart fails, the lips can pay back their debt in a measure—they can speak when the heart sleeps, and by their speaking waken it, just as in times of spiritual dryness a prayer which began as a form and a duty ends in a very transport of awakened love.

Finally, remember your own infinite littleness and God's infinite greatness; never pass one entire day without humbling yourself for a few minutes in this consideration. Remember, in all your prayers, communions, examinations of conscience, confessions, and meditations—remember that you are an immortal soul,

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and that your converse with God is by far the m
awful and overpowering business of your life—th
there is nothing which you have to do on earth whi
can at all compare to it. Down in the hollow of t
earth, in a very pit of his own sins, in the miserab
grave of his own corruption, a poor sinful worm ve
tures to hold converse with the Eternal and Supreme
Blessed Lord God, the incomprehensible and Undivid
Trinity. Judge, brethren, if it be fitting in this tr
mendous and unequal commerce between God and ma
to seek excitements, to work ourselves up into unre
tempers, to be disquieted with His gifts, to be rud
off-hand, familiar, impetuous, restless, forgetting wh
and what we are, and with whose majestic Presen
we are profanely playing; judge whether it be fittin
to be otherwise than humble, patient, expectant, tren
bling, thankful, constrained, calmed by the thought
God, hushed by the breath of the Spirit, and deep
rejoicing, if so be, in the Presence of Jesus Chris
whether it be manifested in the warmth and light
inward consolations, or hardly less certified by that di
tress at its supposed absence, which nothing but tim
love could feel.

THE END.

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A Parish priest. pseud. F112

The blessed sacrament.

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